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COLLECTED POEMS

CONDÉ BENOIST PALLEN



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BY
CONDÉ BENOIST PALLENT

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TO THEODORA

*To thee, God's gift, in whom all gifts unite,
In token of thy gift of love to me,
Who feels that he receives unworthily,
I offer up this sheaf of songs, though slight
Their worth, and poorer still the singer be.
Yet Love through me a fervent message sent;
And I with feeble voice made faint reply,
As reeds to summer breezes passing by
Breathe out a quavering music, humbly bent
Beneath the song, a trembling instrument.
But thou, accepting these poor leafless lays,
Wilt make amend for all imperfectness,
As great ones taking in the taking bless,
And in receiving render highest praise.*

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THE NEW RUBAIYAT

Wisdom is easily seen by them that love her, and is found by them that seek her. For she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her, and she sheweth herself cheerfully in the ways, and meeteth them with all providence. . . .

WISDOM, VI.

THE NEW
RUBAIYAT

THE NEW RUBAIYAT

Old Omar, subtle weaver of the skein
Of doubt entangled in thy muddled brain
In that far East which saw thy distant day,
This later hour awakes thy voice again,

And in a newer tongue recasts the phrase,
That doubled glibly in thine olden ways
On life and death and those dark questionings
Which doubt may answer not, though doubt may
raise.

This newer vase that holds thine ancient wine
Is rich with lines as gracious as were thine,
As delicately graved, as featly traced
With clinging tendril of the worshipped vine.

Nor deem I that the pouring of thy song
From old to newer vessel does thee wrong;
For deft the hand that fashioned the new clay,
A master's hand, and, as a master's, strong.

COLLECTED POEMS

Nor strange that he should seek thine unfaith out,
Who felt a kindred sympathy in doubt
In this wild day when creeds have crumbled down,
Blown like the dust of simoons 'round about.

For that old plaint which sickened thy soft soul,
And to thy lips held up the poisoned bowl
Made luscious with the nectars of the sense,
Still sings your song and echoes all its dole.

And though his noisy doubt the newer man
Boast as fresh light upon the marching van
Of progress to the piping fife of change,
Your doubt was ancient ere his doubt began.

For you, as he, sang faith and unfaith's strife,
And he, as you, chants death the bourne of
life;
He now, as you a thousand years ago,
Into the heart of faith drives deep the knife.

Thy dubious hand upon the shifting scale
Touched every trembling note, drew every wail,
Sounded each plaint and struck each quivering
chord;
He now as you of old — to what avail?

The NEW RUBAIYAT

As dark a riddle is that silent fate
To the blind sceptic of this later date,
As ever answered not to thy light word,
Who asked in dalliance at the outer gate.

For truth speaks only at the inner shrine,
Not in the tavern where they spill the wine;
Pours only through the cleansed and chastened
sense
The cryptic sweetness of the living vine.

To list thy lilting numbers' softened strain,
And hear it chiming with the rhythmed pain
Thy later brothers plaint on modern lutes,
Wakes smiling comment on their little gain.

Alas, that you in mediæval years
Sang all their doubts, shed all their hopeless
tears,
Their creedless creed in all its changes rang,
And coined their wisdom in your shallow fears.

Science but now, they cry with echoing bruit,
Has plucked the higher wisdom's ripened fruit,
Achieved the summit of a nobler view,
And struck in wider knowledge deeper root.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Yet all the garnered learning of the age
Has added not a tittle to your page;
Of that first truth and last the soul desires
Your word as wise as theirs, your wit as sage.

Your wit and theirs both dark as starless night,
Searching the universe with candle-light,
Agrope within the same abyss of dread,
Where depth grows black with depth and height
with height.

In vain they seek, as vain you sought, the clue,
Where doubt makes mocking shadows of the true,
Dissolves the answer in the question's breath,
The doubt that asks from doubt that never
knew.

And echo questioned back the mockery flings,
And doubt that asks of doubt with unfaith rings;
Responsive to the fingers wail the strings,
And as you key the patient chord, it sings.

You drew the music of your plaintive strain
From the sore grief of Philomel's sad pain,
But dashed the sweetness of her chastened song
With doubt, and poisoned all its balm with bane.

The NEW RUBAIYAT

You sang, and sadly sweet your olden rhyme,
The fleeting footsteps of the phantom time,
The dying sweetness of the hastening rose,
Life's transient blush undone by death's swift
crime.

Yea, vanity in him, who lays up store
Of hope to reap his harvest on time's shore,
And sowing all the fields that lie around,
Prepares the granary and the threshing floor.

Ah, swift the courses of the rushing sun,
And changeful are the glittering hours that run
Twixt hope's first blossom and the blown
flower,
For evening sees not what the morn begun.

And Cæsar's dust beneath a peasant's feet,
For wisdom's eloquence were theme replete,
How levelled by the sweeping scythe of time,
Fame and unfame in one oblivion meet.

So has the ages' wisdom ever sung,
And from earth's hollow glories wailing rung
The tribute of its dole; not new your song,
Nor new the lesson of your mellow tongue.

COLLECTED POEMS

Though Jamshyd long has quaffed the last black draught,
And Cæsar, smitten by the bitter shaft
That pricked his glory's bubble, heedless sleeps,
Their dust but shallow soil for wisdom's graft.

The rose you sing from Cæsar's clay that blows
Like Cæsar's glory for an instant shows,
And crumbles back to that from whence it bloomed;
From dust it came and into dust it goes.

Mortal to mortal is the primal law,
Earth back to earth again the whole world's saw:
Mortality is written broad and deep,
And fools that run the easy lesson draw.

Yes, easy is the folly that seems wise,
And cloaks short knowledge in a long disguise;
Easy the truth that time is swift of flight,
The flower that blooms to-day, to-morrow dies.

Easy to drown, the heedless cup within,
The gruesome memory of the death and sin,
That racked the soul with their black questionings,
And as unbidden guests of old stalked in.

The NEW RUBAIYAT

Nor you the first, nor last, to thrust them out
And welcome in their place a reeling rout
Who drink and question not, but steep in floods
Of mellow vintage all the ghosts of doubt.

Brief wisdom and short triumph your poor plot
To cheat the destiny the years allot
By drowning memory in a shallow cup; —
Though now forgetting, you are not forgot.

And while you wander in a vinous mist
Through roseate ways as your soft pleasures list,
The spinner Time still plies his tireless loom,
And you and Death are drawing to the tryst.

What answer then in that appointed place,
When he breathes cold upon your yellowing face,
What answer echoing from the empty cup?
Remorse within the lees, think you, or grace?

TO-DAY the chosen mistress of your lot,
TO-MORROW banned and YESTERDAY forgot:
Lo, YESTERDAY accuses from the dead; —
TO-MORROW beckons for TO-DAY is not:

Fast running out the limit of your thread,
TO-DAY and YESTERDAY forever sped;

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

The whirling loom roars distantly and faint,
And all your years are ashes with the dead.

So careful of the present and its joys,
Hoarding like children all the broken toys;
The little wrecks now strew the dusty floor,
And you forgotten with your childish noise.

So careful now within your eager hands
That not a grain shall waste of time's swift sands—
The very grain you clutch has trickled through;
To-DAY holds not what **YESTERDAY** demands.

To-DAY but borrows what **TO-MORROW** lends,
And pays to **YESTERDAY** what now it spends,
And debtor still with nothing of its own
A bankrupt in the hands of Death it ends.

Why stake on nothingness the all you own,
And cast life's ashes to the whirlwind blown?
He loses time who builds on time alone,
And nothing shall be reaped from nothing sown.

What boot the pleasures of a century's run,
If all their sweets but end where they begun
In that swift nothing of an instant's flight,
A prize that's lost before the prize is won.

The NEW RUBAIYAT

The years gone down into the gaping tomb
Of YESTERDAY are dream wastes in the gloom,
Dim wraiths of time embraced but never held,
Visions that stare from out an ancient room.

Sum up their all and hoard your empty gain:
Hope crushed by fear, joy strangled in the pain,
Life smote by death at every baffled turn,
Dying to live and then to die again.

And when upon the darkened verge you stand,
Where life's faint stream is lost in death's quick
sand,
What garnered treasure do the senses hold?
An eyeless skull within a fleshless hand.

Who turns all things to uses of the sense
Shall glean in sense his only recompense;
For time abused shall be by time avenged;
Life sown in death shall reap in impotence.

• • • •
You tell us that you turned from Wisdom's door,
Sifting the heaped-up rubbish on the floor
Of learning's vestibule, but found no key;
And was the portal locked — are you so sure?

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Think you that thus the road to Wisdom lies,
And on the rungs of knowledge men may rise
To that pure empyrean, as small boys
Plant little ladders to essay the skies?

Not all the gleaning of the labouring West,
Nor all the knowledge of the Orient's quest
May scale a single inch of that far height:
Who seeketh not is he who seeketh best.

Knowledge may reach from shining star to star,
Enthroned on three-ringed Saturn sit afar,
And still as distant be from Wisdom's house
As when it beat against this lower bar.

The door to which in vain your key you plied,
The door you found so tightly sealed, stands wide
To him who bends in leal humility:
He enters not who walks erect in pride.

You thought to compass with your little span
The wide abysses of creation's plan,
And finite measure infinite design;
You — you would be God, who are but man.

Believe th' Omniscient, who ordained the law,
The end as well as the beginning saw;

The NEW RUBAIYAT

Trust thou th' Omnipotent, who made the whole,
O'errules it all: not His, but yours the flaw.

Heaven but countersigns your own decree,
And as you sow your years, so shall they be:
This much of fate is true, that as you plant,
So shall you pluck the fruitage of the tree.

The daring mind that seeks to wholly sift
The heart of mystery, may never lift
The veil that hides her face from prying eyes:
From Wisdom's hand you cannot wrest her gift.

Who would unchastely pierce her secret pale
Shall find her panoplied in hardest mail;
Who seeks to violate her fane shall meet
The entrance barred and closely drawn the veil.

The gathered lightnings shall about him play,
And thunderous wrath shall fill his fearful way,
Whose lustful eye would take her face unveiled;
The sacrilege with blindness shall he pay.

The question put the answer comes in kind:
Who seeks in simple faith in faith shall find
The answer; but pride re-echoes pride,
And blind the understanding of the blind.

COLLECTED POEMS

Who asks of Earth shall hear of Earth reply:
Earth born of earth in earth again shall die;
A fugitive your little course you run,
And there return, and there forever lie.

Who asks of Heaven an unseen voice shall hear
Singing like chimings of the crystal sphere
Of interstellar spaces ringing clear:
There but a little while, forever here;

A little while to school the impatient soul
To read by faith the riddle of the scroll,
That Wisdom writes in hieroglyphs of time;
There but the lesser part, and here the whole.

For Love gazed on the Beauty of the Face
Of His Beloved and upward welled in grace,
As everlasting fountains pouring forth
Abundant floods make bloom a desert place.

Love in creation's wondrous mirror sought
To multiply the image of His Thought,
And pouring forth His Power upon the void,
In Love the likeness of His Love He wrought.

And back again as surging flames aspire
Creation lifts to Love's eternal fire;

The NEW RUBAIYAT

Time but the rushing of her eager flight
Upon the outstretched pinions of desire;

Death, the instant of the journey done,
When all the courses of the way are run,
The door through which departs the passing guest,
Who goes upon the rising of the sun.

For Love devised the plan, and Love makes test
Of Faith to that far end that Love knows best;
And this the message Love by Wisdom sends:
In Faith abide, and leave to Love the rest.

Divorce not Reason from thy failing house
To make with concubines a vain carouse,
But take her, prudent partner of thy years,
To cherish chastely as a faithful spouse.

She, too, is of celestial origin,
And knows how close to Faith she is akin,
Faith, her elder sister, in whose eyes
Dissolves the secret, death, the riddle, sin.

For Reason, modest in her household lore,
Seeks not beyond the threshold of her door;
Diviner truths in Wisdom's utterance given,
Takes from the lips of Faith, and asks no more.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

By Faith, and Faith alone in panic rout
The misbelieving horde is driven out,
Fate's nameless terror lifted from the soul,
Fate, the echo of the voice of doubt.

Forgetfulness in sense a sorry scheme
To cheat the conscience and make seem
The IS and IS NOT all a phantom show,
And time the fading shadow of a dream.

For Reason, drugged a thousand times and more,
A ravaged captive on the tavern floor,
Awakes again loathing her fallen state,
And clamours for her freedom at the door.

Though shamed and flouted victim of thy rape,
She does not die; and you may not escape
Her importuning voice, nor think to end
The issue in the lethe of the grape.

• • • •
Come from the stifling tavern's baleful glare
Into the sunshine and the outer air,
With gladdened nature greeting everywhere,
And looking up to heaven, see, how fair!

How pure the wide savannah's vaulted sweep,
One sapphire flame from glowing deep to deep;

The NEW RUBAIYAT

This crystal cup hold to thy crackled lip,
And drinking feel the freshened pulses leap.

Drink, and clear the phantoms from thy brain,
Cleanse from thy sluggish blood the lecherous bane
That poisoned all the wells of life and truth;
Drink! Look up! and once again be sane.

With chastened sense and in the cleaner mind
Look in pure nature's eyes, and you shall find
A secret half spelled out and half divined:
Within the emblem truth is not confined.

Her secret word a faint prefiguring;
She speaks in shadow of a higher thing,
Like pale penumbra of the light unseen,
The sun's veiled glory from an outer ring.

Within the deepened shadow's darkened plot
You sought the source of light and found it not;
Your eyes grew dim with searching in the dark,
And blindness out of darkness was begot.

The shadow is but shade of hidden light;
It is the sun by earth eclipsed makes night:
Heaven is gracious to our little power,
And her far secret tempers to our sight.

COLLECTED POEMS

The need of Faith from nature's secret learn;
Reason from Faith and Faith from Love in turn
Draws life and light; in One see all else rest,
And in things seen the things unseen discern.

And though thy years are drawing to their close,
And youth and spring have faded with the rose,
Faith plucks the thorn of thy regret, and lo!
Upon the naked stem Hope's floweret blows;

And all the garden blossoms, and the Vine
Into Love's chalice pours diviner Wine:
Faith holds the secret of the sacred sign;
Her eyes search deep and long, and make it thine.

A SONG OF SIXPENCE

Sing a song of sixpence
And a pocket full of rye! —
There are millions in it
For one with a business eye.

Then sing a song of sixpence
And a pocket full of rye!
Ho, the jingle of the sixpence! —
And will you sell or buy?

The world is full of sixpence,
The ways are strewn with rye —
And have you then no sixpence!
Better by far to die.

The multitude of sixpence,
The plenitude of rye! —
And yet I have no sixpence;
How poor are you and I!

I without a sixpence
And you without the rye —
Lo! Death on a gaunt black horse
Under an ebon sky.

COLLECTED POEMS

You sing a song of beauty,
Your heart is full of youth —
Whence have you wandered, friend,
Into the paths of ruth?

I have, alas! no sixpence,
And you, alas! no rye —
You sing of life in death,
Of death in life sing I!

*Ho! there, on your gaunt black horse
Under the ebon sky!
And they sing their song of sixpence
And a pocket full of rye!*

BENEDICTION

White sail upon the distant blue
Swift flying shallop with your snowy wings,
Here from the shore I waft to you
A message that a poet sings.

I bless you as you fade afar
Where heaving sea and heaven merge,
A faintly gleaming silver star
Upon the trembling ocean's verge.

May gentle winds from spotless skies
And halcyon seas about you play,
And all of Heaven's guardian eyes
Keep myriad watch upon your way.

May dolphins spout their silvery brine
Before your swift melodious keel,
And whitest suns upon you shine
As fleckless days about you wheel.

And when the far-off headland's slope
Upears its beaconed star above
And lights the haven of your hope,
My blessing waft you to your love.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Oh happy be the meeting then
When heart beats joyous unto heart,
And from the deep shall draw again
Two gracious spirits long apart.

And may that love in blessing prove
Its kinship to my distant prayer;
Though all the seas be my remove,
Let me your blessing share.

For as I pray that blessing on
Both you and yours across the sea,
May your fair Love's sweet benison
In turn pour down on mine and me.

A FABLE FOR LYDIA

Sweet Love is slain! I saw him at your gates
Prostrate, ah me! upon th' ensanguined ground,
Slain too with his own arrow and by you!
What dreadful and most clamorous deed
For vengeance this, O Fairest Cruelty,
Than Artemis more cruel when she slew
The children of the tearful Niobe
Repentant of her boast.

Who would not weep
Save you, to see him marbled there in death,
His traitorous arrow in his gaping wound;
The crimson fountain of his streaming life
Poured out upon the pitying earth, his locks
Astray upon his alabaster brow
With veiled eyes beneath pale pencilled lids,
Eclipsed in darkness.

Woe, deep woe and pain
Divinely bitter in the breasts of all
The gods, and cloud about Olympian heights
Heavy with sorrow of the brooding storm;

COLLECTED POEMS

And direst wrath within Olympian halls,
For that young Eros lies untimely dead.

Zeus lays his hand upon his thunderbolt,
And in the darkened caverns of his mind
Wrath mutters, while at the presage of his
frown
O'er drooping eyes glowing with pented lightnings
All heaven pales, and Heré veils her face
With trembling hands.

Great Mulciber, aloft
His mighty hammer swung to smite and shatter,
Stands, a statued rage; Apollo starts
And grips his silver bow, one hand upon
His swiftest shaft ablaze with restless fire;
And by him panoplied Minerva lifts
Her poised spear keen with a thousand deaths,
While on her shield the Gorgoned locks hiss
wrath.

So all the gods in fair Olympus' round,
Each in the several manners of their powers,
Divinely angry and divinely swift
To vengeance, rapt in the amazèd rage
Of sudden harm breaking the halcyon joy
Of their Olympian calm, together rise
Threatening.

A FABLE for LYDIA

But chief the Cytherean goddess,
The roses slain in either cheek, and all
Her loosened tresses streaming down
Cascaded gold in riotous neglect,
Lifts up her voice piercing and wailing out
Upon the shuddering winds that bear her grief
To the four ends of earth disconsolate;
For she is mother of young Eros dead.

And at the foot of Zeus' throne she kneels
With outstretched arms and slender petaled hands,
And prays the great Ceraunian Father thus:
"Not vengeance do I seek, O Thunderer,
Not thy red bolt upon the guilty head —
For what avail that now to Eros slain? —
Though just thy vengeance for the sacrilege —
But life again for Eros, life renewed,
Immortal save from his own arrow sent
By hand of mortal, who o'ercomes the god
Himself and slays him with the fatal shaft
Aimed at his conqueror: For so the Fates
In council sacrosanct decreed, beyond
Thy might to break or bend — Frown not, O Zeus,
Father of gods and men that so I plead!
But hold thy hand! Release the eager bolt,
And hear me more before it be too late! —
For in that far inscrutable abyss

COLLECTED POEMS

Of Fate, that underlies Olympus' heights
And all the vast foundations of the world,
'Twas willed of eld that only by the hand
That breached the fatal way of horrid death
To Eros' heart, could life be brought again;
If that same hand but pluck the arrow forth
And turn it on the heart that owns the hand,
Eros again will breathe immortal life
And gladden our high court with ancient joy.
Stay then thy hand, hurl not the dreadful bolt!
And seal not on the brow of Eros death
Forever! And in her heart that slew, the barb
Transfixed shall bring not death, but fairer life,
For fatal unto him alone alas! his shaft.
Straightway to earth will I with wingèd speed
And seek out her, who slew my boy and made
Olympus dark for all the gods, and earth
Disconsolate — a goddess at her feet,
Praying her tender pity for a god,
My son!"

So saying rises the mother goddess,
And gathering, as she rises, her unloosed locks,
With delicate and deftest fingers winds
The glittering strands in queenly coils about
Her head, and crowns it with their massy gold.
And going to the jacinth parapet
That rings Olympus height, where coo her doves

A FABLE *for* LYDIA

In silvery harness to her ivory car,
Mounts, and speeding downward to the earth
Wings swiftly through the flowing air that sings
In amorous cadence through the slender spokes
Of golden wheels, and far into the deep
Of blue below sinks from the straining sight
Of all the rangèd gods upon the verge
Of high Olympus, silent watching.

TREASURE-TROVE

An evening palmer onward creeps the day
To seek the sanctuaried Sun's far shrine —
O Pilgrim, thither bear some gift of mine
As treasure-trove when I shall come that way.

LIFE

What bring you flaming Sun from out the East,
Birth, death, or love or hate to me this day?
What take you crimson Sun within the West?
What yesterday I brought and took away.

MARIA IMMACULATA

I

How may I sing, unworthy I,
Our Lady's glorious sanctity?
She whose celestial shoon
Rest on the hornèd moon
In Heaven's highest galaxy;
She whom the poet sang of old
In that rare vision told
In soft Tuscan speech of gold,
The spotless spouse and mother-maid,
The goodliest sapphire in Heaven's floor inlaid,
Around whom wheels the circling flame
Of the rapt seraph breathing Mary's name,
While choir to choir replies
In growing harmonies
Through all the glowing spheres of Paradise,
Till universal Heaven's glad estate
Rings jubilation to their queen immaculate.

II

Ah me! Unworthy I to sing
The stainless mother of my King,
My King and Lord,
The Incarnate Word,

M A R I A I M M A C U L A T A

Heaven itself comprest
Within her virgin breast!
How may my faltering rhyme
Sing of Eternity in time,
Omnipotence in human frailty exprest,
Our earthly garden fragrant with celestial thyme.
What Muse, though great Urania guide her flight,
May dare the sacrosanct and awful height
Of that mysterious sublime
Within the secret counsels of the Infinite!
Omniscience there supreme and sole
Clasps the beginning and the whole
Of Love beyond created sight,
Uncreate and quintessential light!
Before the splendor of that ray
Cherub and seraph fall away
Dazzled and broken by excess
Of overpowering blessedness,
Yet panting for the fulness of the bliss
That breathes consuming fire from Love's un-
kenned abyss.

Not through that fiery sphere my way,
But here where shines the veiled day,
The flames of mystery insteeped
In this our mortal clay;
For in her maiden breast asleep
Lies all the Love of Heaven's deep,

COLLECTED POEMS

The holy circle of her zone
Incarnate Love's terrestial throne.

III

The great archangel veils his face
Before her: "Hail, full of grace!"
And Heaven is clasped of earth;
While all the circling spheres with all their choirs
Around her wheel seraphic fires.
Eden rises to its second birth;
Again the prime estate
Of man is renovate,
And all the elder worth renewed in her immacu-
late;
Virgin and spouse of Him
Who breathes the virtue of the Seraphim,
Virgin and mother of the Eternal Son,
Daughter, Virgin, Spouse in one!
The spotless mate of spotless Dove,
The one great miracle of God's love,
From all eternity the chosen bride,
Where Holiness untainted might abide;
Save only her none, none
Exempt from sin's dominion;
Save only her of Adam's race
Or heavenly line, none full of grace;

MARIA IMMACULATA

On her alone, on her alone
The torrent of His love poured down
The deep abundance of its flood
Into the pure channels of her maidenhood,
The fleckless mirror of her grace
Reflecting all the beauty of His Face.

IV

She looks with human eyes
Into the eyes of Paradise;
Upon her virgin breast the Babe Divine
Gazes again into her eyne;
O vanity of words to tell
The wonder of that spell,
The ravishment of bliss
Upwelling from the deep abyss
Of Love incarnate gazing in the eyes
Of his terrestrial paradise!
See Heaven within her arms,
Gathered against all harms,
Innocence by innocence addrest,
Virgin love by virgin love carest,
The sinless mother and the sinless Son
For Heaven and earth to gaze upon!
Her living image on her knee,
O the depths of her maternity!

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Her God, her Infant at her breast,
O Love beyond all utterance express,
The Eternal Word in virgin flesh made manifest!

v

Ye sons of Adam rejoice
With exultant voice!
Shake off your chains! Arise!
The ancient dragon has no power
O'er Jesse's virgin flower,
And stricken 'neath a maiden's sandal lies.
Nor may his venom'd breath so much
As her garment's outer margin touch;
And sin's torrential flood,
That whelmed all Adam's flesh and blood,
Its loathsome stream turns back
Before her footsteps' radiant track.

VI

Rejoice, children of men!
Behold again
Your flesh rejuvenate
In her immaculate!
Rejoice with exceeding joy,
For in her free from sin's alloy

MARIA IMMACULATA

Your renovated race
In plenitude of grace
Dare look again unshamed upon its Maker's
Face!
Chosen to bear the Eternal Word,
In her your more than dignity restored;
In her the more than golden worth
Of Eden's prime when Heaven was linked with
earth;
Unstained by Adam's guilty forfeiture,
In her your long corrupted flesh made pure;
For of her, flesh of flesh and bone of bone,
Eternal Love builds up His stainless throne!

VII

Rejoice and be glad this day!
In jubilation lay
Your tribute at her feet,
Spotless and most meet,
The mystic rose of Jesse's root,
To bear the heavenly fruit;
Wisdom's seat and Heaven's gate,
Our surest advocate,
Mother of God immaculate!
Be glad, O Adam's clay,
Be glad this happy day.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

And with accordant voice acclaim
Our spotless Lady's stainless fame;
Be ye exceeding glad and sing
The mother of our King.
And though unworthy be my strain,
She is too tender not to deign
To lend a gracious ear
To this her children's humble prayer:
Mother of Mercy, hear!
Mother whose face is likest His,
Who our Redeemer is,
Grant us one day to share
Thy happiness in gazing on His Face,
Who found thee without spot and full of grace!

LOVE AND DEATH

**Watcher, whose eyes are fever bright
With peering through the dragging night,
See you the coming of the light?**

**Long have we waited for your word,
The revelation you have heard
From Nature's lips, like voices stirred**

**In Memnon's image, when the ray
Of morning smites his wakening clay
To music with the coming day.**

**The message that we hope from thee,
A new evangel, that will be
The death of foolish mystery.**

**Have you not plumbed the central deep
Of life, and sifted all the heap
In jealous Nature's guarded keep;**

**And all her labyrinth of dread
Traversed with Ariadne's thread,
Unmindful of the quick or dead?**

COLLECTED POEMS

We wait to hear the secret thing
You've plucked from Saturn's ruby ring,
The stellar message that you bring

From other worlds, communicate
With freedom from this lower state
Heavy with death and black with fate.

Beneath time's leaden mantle bowed,
With slow step creeps the anguished crowd
Under a heaven dark with cloud;

A way of toil, a path of fears
Barren with thorns and salt with tears,
How filmy our short span of years;

A gossamer athwart the face
Of upper and of nether space,
Like smoke to vanish from its place.

Grief in life's cup distills its gall;
The very sweets begin to pall,
And Death awaits to drain it all.

What joyous message yours to tell,
Who stand upon the pinnacle
Of knowledge, like a sentinel

LOVE *and* DEATH

Upon a leaguered city's tower,
Awaiting rescue's golden hour
Against the foe's encircling power:

See you, through shadows of the night,
The first faint flush of dawning light
Gleaming on armour burnished bright,

The van of armies marching down
To rescue of the fainting town
And victory's long awaited crown?

We weep, we suffer and we die;
Dumb is the earth and dumb the sky —
Feed not our hopes upon a lie!

The race you tell us is the flower
Of æons building with blind power
Up to the distant crowning hour:

I look upon the face of Death;
And Sorrow asks with sobbing breath:
What is the foolish thing he saith?

And stricken Love with lowly head
Stands dumb beside the silent dead; —
She heedeth not what he hath said.

COLLECTED POEMS

What cares my Love for prophecy
Of unborn races; what to me
The ghostly dream of time to-be?

My Love but yesterday was born,
Blossomed a rose upon life's thorn,
And withered now, lies plucked and torn.

Why prate about millennial hours,
The far result of unknown powers,
When Death is scything 'mid the flowers?

Can you restore a single leaf
Once gathered in his crowded sheaf,
Or pluck the poisoned thorn of grief?

My love is more than love of race,
A single love for one dear face,
Now locked in Death's unloved embrace.

Upon the bier in Love's purview
Lies all the race Love ever knew;
There all the sweet in all the rue.

Love ever grows from one sole root,
And blossoms on a single shoot
Upburgeoning to perfect fruit.

L O V E *a n d* D E A T H

Within the heart's red garden blows
The splendour of its queenly rose,
The single blossom that it knows.

Now lies my flower in Death's cold hand,
Its petals scattered on the strand,
And all the garden choked with sand.

I stand before time's ribbèd gate,
And wondering ask: Can love abate,
Is Death the final seal of fate?

Is Love but one sweet moment's bloom,
An instant's flash upon the gloom,
Then sudden ashes of the tomb?

Can you, who scan the secret ways
Of hidden systems through the maze
Of heavenly hieroglyphs ablaze

With myriad suns,— can you not read
Some answer in that luminous screed,
How Love from Death's iron bond is freed?

Or you, who search the rocky girth,
That ribs our ancient mother earth,
For traces of the primal birth; —

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

What answer to Love's questioning
From her dread wisdom can you wring,
What word to stir Hope's fluttering?

What gain to Love the garnered store
Of all your microscopic lore,
The little less or little more

Of knowledge, if it hold no key
To that abysmal mystery,
Which parteth now my love from me?

Nature you say is wheeling fast
Downward to that chaotic last,
When all the hours shall be but past,

And all time bound within its zone
Upon the void in ashes blown,
With Death sole victor on his throne.

Love turns with blinded eye away,
And gazing on the trestled clay,
Scarce knoweth now what she may say;

Her heart benumbed with some strange fear,
The word's hard meaning, dimly clear,
Sounds strange upon her anguished ear.

L O V E *a n d* D E A T H

I take my love's cold hand and feel
Its icy numbness upward steal
Around my heart, and there congeal

In grief's deep frost, like winter's breath
On some lone pool upon the heath,
When all the ground lies white in death.

The lips are silent whence once came
The softened accents of my name
In discreet praise or loving blame:

There where I plucked the flower of speech,
The crumpled petals ashening bleach,
Though Love in anguish now beseech

One little word, one faintest stir,
Like breath upon a gossamer,
An echo whispered to aver

That out beyond this darkened year
Love lives and rules a nobler sphere,
Though Death stand sceptered tyrant here.

Alas! no hint, no murmured sigh
From those pale lips to make reply,
That Love herself is not to die!

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Death only knows the dead are dead,
The body sinks, the life is sped,
And all we knew evanished.

O hollow creed and empty boast,
That failest when Love needs thee most,
A shattered wreck on Death's iron coast.

Love craves and seeks a fuller life;
Though all of Nature seems at strife
With her, and all her ways are rife

With signs of death, as broadcast leaves
On barren earth when autumn grieves,
Love heedeth not, but still believes

Beyond the grosser evidence
Of the time-stuffed and halting sense,
She yet shall find full recompense.

And from the ashes of her grief
A hidden hope puts forth a leaf,
That yet may burgeon for the sheaf,

Which Faith shall gather in the grain,
Sown in the furrows of her pain
To ripen for the harvest's gain.

L O V E *a n d* D E A T H

And in that hope Death's stony face
Takes something of a softening grace,
Like light upon a barren place;

For stirring in her frosted heart,
Love feels the sudden pulses start,
New life in quickening throbings dart

Its joyous anguish through each vein;
And all the winter of her pain
Weeps from her eyes like April rain.

A hope in death! O wondrous thing!
The desert's waste agreeen with spring,
Death's very rood emblossoming!

Look up, O trembling Love, and see
The outstretched arms of that great tree,
Which crowns the brow of Calvary.

Here planted in Death's bitter root
Upspringeth the immortal shoot
To bear the glorious after-fruit.

Around the blood-stained Brow entwines
Death's barren coronal of spines,
Plucked from a waste of withered vines;

COLLECTED POEMS

**Lo, bathed within that quickening flood
Each sterile spike bursts into bud
And reddens into lustihood!**

**And looking now upon the bier,
My love no longer drops a tear,
For Death's vast mystery grows clear.**

ODE

[Read at the Centenary of Georgetown University,
February 21, 1889.]

I

When youth, O Alma Mater, on the threshold
stood,
The hot thirst of fame within the blood,
And turned with longing eyes
To life's giant enterprise,
Under the gilded future's spell
Lightly we said farewell
To these dear scenes, and down yon narrow
street,
With throbbing heart and hastening feet,
Sought the jostling throng
That o'er life's highway streams along:
Lightly we went, Hope in the van,
While life like music ran
Melodiously through heart and brain,
Each step a victory, each moment gain.
Lightly we went: but laden now
Return with deeper love blown to full flower
By riper knowledge of the absent hour:

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

And on this day of days,
When like a hundred stars upon thy brow
Thy hundred years in splendour blaze,
Lay at thy feet the tribute of our praise.
As dew wept down on leaf and flower, when morn
Grows tremulous within the east scarce born,
Mirrors in every crystal drop the radiant sun,
A thousand lesser lights reflecting one,
Our loves receive thy love's desire,
And myriad-fold return the sacred fire.

II

From distant lands, where in soft splendour
beams
The Southern Cross through silent deeps of air,
Making a solemn glory of the night that seems
As though angelic choirs were chanting there;
From lands where winter's icy banners flare
Upon rude blasts blown down in roaring war
From solitudes beneath the polar star;
From lands where morning's earliest rays unbar
The gates of sleep to rouse the eager throng
With the keen note of industry's shrill song,
While slumbering cities into being start
And barter roars within the busy mart;
From lands where boundless prairie rolls along

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

In endless leagues, and towering summits leap
To cloudless heights above Pacific's deep,
Thy many sons assemble here
To greet thee in thy hundredth year
Of sweet maternity, and lay aside,
For this brief hour, the buckler and the spear,
As armèd knights were wont of old to bide
The truce of God, remembering Christ had died:—
From all life's walks we come in peace arrayed;
Where feverish Commerce plies the looms of
trade
With ceaseless hum, and from the myriad ways
Of Law, whose justice-tempered ægis stays
And turns unbridled evil's reckless blade;
Where armed with new-found powers sage Galen's
art
Arrests the fatal flight of Death's dread dart;
Where on the stormy seas of high debate
The Nation's wisdom guides the bark of state:
Where sweet Religion takes sublimer part
And drawing with her threefold cord above
Leads fallen nature up to perfect Love.
Yet not alone thy sons that here below
Lift the glad voice in jubilation's song,
Salute thee, but where Heaven's starry bow
Rounds the vast firmament with fire, a throng
Invisible, blest spirits once among

COLLECTED POEMS

Thine earthly sons take up the great refrain,
Till all the blissful heights give back the strain,
That falls a benediction on thy head
From blessed hands of thy beloved dead;
And thy triumphant sons thence looking down
Flash on thy brow a spiritual crown,
A diadem of light, whose splendour rays
Immortal glory through eternal days!

III

When virgin Liberty yet stood
Within the dawn of maidenhood,
Upon these hills was fixed thy seat,
The home of truth, and learning's calm retreat
By blue Potomac's peaceful flood.
Scarce then had died the furious beat
Of rolling drum in loud alarm
Sounding the patriot's call to arm
Against the tyrant foe;
While yet the reeking sod was warm
With martyr blood spilt in the fearful throes
Of battle, and the trembling earth
Groaned in travail of a nation's birth,
Came the man of peace, who bore
The cross and laurel to the shore,
Where sweet Cohonguroton's waters pour,

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

And planted here the sacred tree.
And this was he
Of that same faith and race
With him who, taking up the bloodless steel
To make the Nation's woe or weal,
Alone of all the signers dared to trace
Not only his heroic name, but native place,
And with the dauntless front of Freedom's son
Wrote "Carroll of Carrollton!"
Rejoice in thy noble stem
And firm foundations wrought
When minion foes were taught
How priceless is the gem
Of Freedom bought
By patriot steel in patriot hands
Against a narrow tyrant's slavish bands!
Around thy cradle blew the trumpet blast
Of victory, when Liberty at last
Burst the chains that held her bound,
And all the land leaped at the glorious sound,
And from the dragon-jaws of Strife
A Nation sprang to life,
Strong-limbed and beautiful in power
Through mighty wrestling in that heavy hour!
Around thy cradle redolent
Breathed the fresh fragrance of the spring
Of Freedom, and its vigour blent

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

With thine own blood, and sent
Thy pulses dancing to the swing
Of music born in prophecy
Of all the glory yet to be!

IV

A century has rolled its solemn tide
Along the Nation's path, and by thy walls
The generations ebbed and died,
Fallen in the waste of time, as falls
Yon river to the distant sea —
And lo! the promise of thine infancy!
A stately palace rears its tower-capped height
Upon thy hills, truth's templed shrine,
Shedding, like a beacon light,
Its welcome rays across the brine
To outward speeding ships that brave
Midmost ocean's storm-beat wave,
Or homeward struggling barks that creep
To haven from the warring deep.
Beneath thy roof-tree's sheltering span,
Science deep in Nature's various plan
From lifeless dust to living man,
Houses all her lore; and Art with eyes,
Within whose depths all beauty mirrored lies
As in calm waters summer skies,

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Kindles at thy hearth her living flame;
And with thee dwells the gentle Dame,
Whose smile upon the exile's wandering path
Like light soothed time-worn Dante's bitter wrath,
Divine Philosophy, that strikes the trembling
strings
To the deep note that vibrates from the sum of
things!

v

“Not all I am shall die!”
Was the Roman poet’s cry.
Though now no conjuring priest
Leads the fattened beast
To the smoking altar, and the pride
Of Rome lies buried in her dust,
Not all, O Bard, has died,
And thou hast conquered in the larger trust:
Here where learning holds her seat,
New-born generations greet
Thee, crowning with fresh bays
The triumphs of those elder days.
Nor thou alone of Greek or Roman line
Find’st here a temple and a shrine;
The stately Mantuan,
Who sang the Arms and Man,
Ovid, whose melting lines in amorous flow

COLLECTED POEMS

Like torrid rivers ran,
The silver-worded Cicero,
The buskined muse of Sophocles
And trumpet-tongued Demosthenes,
Old Homer, whose heroic strain
Bade gods and men contend on Troia's fatal
plain,—
All, all the mighty train,
Who made the heart and brain
Of ancient letters, and who sent,
As fountains of the firmament,
The impetuous crystal flood
Of their rich speech into the blood
Of nations yet within the womb,
Find here a wider reign
Than universal Rome could claim!
Ye quickening powers! no Stygian gloom
Can quench the vital flame
That breathes its glory round the classic name!
Not dead, but living voices of the past,
Not dead and to be cast
Like blank annals of barbarian kings
Into the void of forgotten things,
But living souls with power to reach
The human heart in human speech
And bind the generations each to each,
Leaping the centuries and giving breath

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

To ancient forms snatched back from empty death,
Till man in that large sympathy of mind
Begot by wide communion with his kind,
Across the age's broadening span
Responsive greets his fellow-man!
Not death, but life prevails, and though men's lives
Drop off the stem like ripened fruit,
Death reaps not all, the seed survives
To strike in other soil the living root;
So generations gathering up the past,
Each reaps a widening profit from the last,
And from the seed by others sown
Wears the flower of wisdom as its own.

VI

Splendour of poet's song, the living light
Of letters across the night
Of ages fled, Science begirt with power
To build a universe from every flower
That blows, and Wisdom's glowing height,
Whence the eagle mind may gaze
Into the sun of truth's full blaze,
Are not all the glories of thy house;
These are thine by that high right

COLLECTED POEMS

Which Nature's self allows
To those who consecrate their days
To Learning's thorn-strewn ways:
A light of still more constant glow,
A flame sprung from a purer fire
Than aught of human can inspire,
Sheds its clear radiance on thy brow;
A glory and a light that first
Rose from Manresa's cave, and burst
In fiery splendour on a wondering world,
When meek Loyola's hand unfurled
His holy standard blazoned with the line,
"The glory be not ours, O Lord, but thine!"
O happy issue of Pamplona's war,
When sank a warrior's earthly star,
Not quenched, but with rekindled beam to rise
And shed celestial fires from other skies!
Where Error rears its crested pride
Against the spotless bride
Of Truth, Loyola's flashing blade descends
Upon the mailed casque, and rends
The stubborn visor, laying bare
The serpent face that lurked in hiding there;
With steady front against the swarming foe
Manresa's knight rains down the deadly blow,
As on the bloody field of Tours, Martel
With thundering mace smote down the infidel!

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERISTY

No carnal weapons wields he in his fight,
For his a spiritual sword of light,
Forged in the glowing smithies of the soul,
By Love attempered and by Truth made whole;
No carnage reddens his victorious way,
He combats to give life and not to slay,
And like the hero fabled to our youth,
He smites giant Error to free the princess Truth.
Still other conquests wait the black-robed knight,
In other fields to wage the sacred fight:
See Xavier come, a burning brand
Of love to distant India's sun-scorched strand,
And as a flame consumed by its own fire
His wasted frame in ardent love expire:
Beneath our skies behold Loyola's band,
When pagan night yet palled the distant land,
With martyr toil the savage waste explore
From distant Maine to far Pacific's shore,
Christ in the heart and crucifix in hand:
No terrors daunt, no lawless wild appals
Where love of souls the saintly hero calls,
But onward through the trackless waste before,
His fearless steps first tread the virgin sod,
And consecrate a new-found world to God!

COLLECTED POEMS

VII

These, O Alma Mater, are thy bays,
Thy coronal of praise,
Wherewith thy hundred years are crowned;
These the morning stars that rise
To fill with golden light the skies
That circle thy first cycle round;
These the immortal fires that know
No setting in heaven's wide expanse,
But kindle with an ever brighter glow
As years in crystal floods advance:
We who stand upon the shore,
And watch the impetuous flow
Of time's river onward pour
Into the future's formless sea,
Dimly dream the glory yet to be;
As in the gateways of the morn,
When the waning stars are shorn
Of their soft splendours, day is born,
And the shimmering east grows white
With the upward creeping light
Against the westward flying night,
We divine the glory still concealed
By the beauty half revealed.
Thy hundred years upon thy cheek

ODE for GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Glowing with perennial truth,
Sit like the first flush of youth;
Nor envious Time may wreak
His wrinkled vengeance on thy brow,
And his harsh furrows plough
To mark the rugged path
Of his relentless wrath.
And when our days have measured out their span
To the last limit of the thread,
And we join Death's wan caravan
To the shoreless regions of the dead,
His dread shade shall have no power
To blight the blossom of the flower
That wreathes thy head;
But as the generations pass
Like phantoms in Time's darkened glass,
And ages in the ever-widening void go down,
From their dust shall spring fresh bays to weave
thy crown!

AMARANTHUS

I

Sweet quiet of death, made quieter by the sound
Of murmurous leaves above these quiet graves
Far from the angry city's fretful noise
Of loud mortality forgetting death.
Here let me rest and soothe the unquiet heart
With myrrh of meditation, where they sleep,
Who sleep in patient death. How still they sleep,
Arched with the giant limbs of sober oaks
Fretting the liquid roof of heaven's round
With tremulous tracery of trembling leaves just
stirred
By reverent winds! Smooth slopes the silken
sward
Soft o'er the silent host, like hope's green mantle
In promise of the miracle to come,
When at the great archangel's jubilant note
The battlements of death shall crumble shaken
down,
As those proud turrets tottering tumbled flat
Before the blasts of marching Israel.
Sweet comfort of the mourning soul, that death
Holds not all life within its hoary palm,

A M A R A N T H U S

Nor hollow eyes of sightless mockery
The final image of the days that looked
Upon a living world through lucent windows,
And saw life smile again through other eyes
That love enkindled into purer light,
The dawning promise of a deathless day.

II

Here greatness finds its kindred clod, and fame
A common clay mingling with lowlier names
Levelled by blasts of death to nothingness;
Here the vain lips of praise find voiceless echoes
In hollow chambers sounding silence back,
The phantom cries of images of dust;
And though the shouting universe should roll
The long reverberations of its voice
Through all the shaking avenues of time,
And the wide spaces of the firmament
Tremble with all their stars to that loud cry,
Death makes no answer from his dusty sleep.

How quiet thy rest, unheedful of the fret
Of time, the fiery fuming of the day,
The feverish fancy of the restless night
Eager for morn, and morn pursuing eve
In hope expectant of the happier hour

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

That never lights except to wing away
Again;— how quiet their changeless sleep, and
free
From time's illusive speed outstripping time
As one that runs to overtake his shadow.

Here life lays down its fardel with a smile,
Disrobes the chafing garments that it wore
Through all the noisy masquerade, and sleeps
Dreamless that sleep as deep as silence is,
And everlasting as the voiceless hills
That time has builded to the end of time.
Sweet music to the ear of meditation,
The mute melodious voice of sleep murmuring
Lethean solace to the harried soul,
As plash of waters to the famished ear
Of one athirst midst white Sahara's sands:
Sweet sleep that kisses out the wrinkled cares,
And breathes the roses' crumpled petals smooth,
Thy cool white hand upon my forehead lay,
As does a mother on her child's flushed brow,
Till I, too, rest in dreamless vacancy.

III

And wouldst thou be content, O soul, to lie
In that deep emptiness, the wide abyss

A M A R A N T H U S

Of death, grim depth unsoundable and void,
Where time embouches, and mortality,
Like some swift river in the salt sea's waste,
Pours all the gathered fulness of its course —
Content to lie and know not, lost to use
Of all the spirit's powers, and swayed
A weed along the slowly creeping wave
Of Lethe undulating heavily?

To rest were blesseſ, but to stagnate, woe:
The wearied soul craves life not death, new life,
The glad refreshment of the wasted powers
To rise again in recreated bloom,
As lift the shrivelled stalks in long parched fields
Under the moistening kisses of the rain,
Abundant gladness from benignant clouds.

But when I speak to Nature of this hope,
Heedless her ear and dumb her stony lips,
Like that huge image in Egyptian sands
With lidless eye in leaden speechlessness
Staring the crowding centuries hastening by,
As time were nothing and death the all of life:
Nor all the framework of this universal dust
Puts forth one little blossom of the hope
Of that large other life beyond death's touch;
From dust to dust again the barren cry

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Sobbing through all the empty wastes of time,
While saddened Nature moans through all her
days
As life pours back its bloom to nothingness.

Not there the answer, not there the golden gleam
Of promise kindling to the dawn of hope
Ushering the fulness of the day the soul
Awaits; but turning to the east I watch
With Pilate's soldiers for the coming light.

IV

About steep Sion's walls silence and sleep,
Twin sentinels, keep ghostly watch and tell
The sliding hours through all the heavy night,
While Death makes lament on the icy hills,
And mourning bends his hooded head and moans
Presaging vanquishment, the mighty lord
Of earth and man, since closed the clang ing gates
On guilty Adam and his weeping spouse.

Now all the heavens stoop unto the west,
Tremble the expectant stars with paling fires,
And from the awakening east the soughing winds
Like distant melodies come faintly up
The vaulted darkness of the wasting night,

A M A R A N T H U S

And through the half-drawn portals of the dawn
Voices of jubilation seem to sound
As from a shouting multitude far off.

v

Lo! Death lies prostrate in his kindred dust,
And Pilate's soldiers by a vacant tomb!
And Nature sings, for day is here, and bursts
Her melody from blossomed branch and floods
The enamelled verdure of the radiant field,
Pouring its amorous gladness on the air
In all the thousand glories of its flowers!
And shines the city in the golden flood
Of morning, and golden all the encircling hills;
And on Golgotha's brow the naked Cross
Glows golden with the light of new-born day.

For he hath risen, Lord and King of Death!
For he hath risen, Lord and King of Life!
Rejoice, my soul, and fear not Death, who died
That day and fell before my Lord and King
Forever; rejoice, and fear not; Death is dead,
And everlasting Life, eternal rose,
Unfolds immortal petals blown by Love
To perfect fulness in perpetual light!

COLLECTED POEMS

VI

In him they sleep, who rest so quietly here,
In him to rise who sleep in patience here,
Far from the angry city's fretful noise
Of loud mortality forgetting death:
They sleep in his great peace, the halcyon calm
Of that deep peace the world can never give.
Blessèd their sleep in Him, who slept as they
To rise again, as they in Him shall rise
To sleep no more: here let me sleep in Him,
And slipping off the weeds of time rise up
Robed by His hand in immortality.

YOUTH

Out of the spacious east of life
Streams the clear dawn of youth's fair days,
The matin song and gracious ways
Of the sweet prime whose memory plays
Across the soul's long gaze
Like far off boreal splendours rife
With aureoles in northern skies,
Where the white wold lies
Illimitable to heaven's myriad eyes
In the waste night's immensities.
Out of those auroral hours,
Like perfume of far flowers
Borne by the flagging breeze
O'er intervening leas
Of barrenness, that fragrant prime
Comes borne sweet through wastes of time
Across wide plunging seas
From morn's Hesperides;
Ere youth with innocence sublime
Had left the golden clime
Of his fair matin, keen to sail
His slender shallop to the leaping gale.

COLLECTED POEMS

Fair through the after years,
Across wide chasms swollen with storm
And dimmed with mists of tears,
Gleams the soft radiance of the form
That youth had builded fair
Out of the impalpable air
Of serenest hope,
Before life learned to grope
Amid the sombre bosks of melancholic care.
Whiter than the mountained snow,
Brighter than the crystal glow
Of virgin sunlight yet unkist
By grosser air to amethyst,
That lambent radiance sent
Its paradisial rays through all life's firmament:
Earth felt its lucent heat
Flood her central seat,
And her breast replete
With its soft warmth grew sweet
With fragrance of the bud
Reddening to flower upon her blood;
While from the glowing sphere
Of the overhanging year
Meting with variant sisterhood
Of changeful moons the moving season's
mood,
Rolled virgin hymnals all unheard,

Y O U T H

Save by youth's spirit stirred
To catch the diviner word
Angelically murmured;
For the heart of youth alone
May catch the ethereal tone
Of heāven's unseen zone,
Youth that looks with eyes
Seeing only paradise
In earth's wide visibilities,
Nor yet has learned the curse
That locks in death the glittering universe.

Then were all things true,
Time all sweets, nor any rue
Within Life's spacious garden grew;
There youth elate
Held royal state,
The smiling monarch of obedient fate;
While throned in every eye
Honour beamed resplendent sanctity;
And there Eve's gracious power,
The garden's golden dower,
As the virgin moon,
Night's chaste plenilune,
Lifts the vast sea's heaving flood,
Drew all life's tides to noble womanhood,
For all was fair and all was good.

COLLECTED POEMS

Reign, then, Youth's Memory;
Let me your captive be,
And reap felicity
In the far distant gleam
Of that pure matin dream
Before the hour of ruth,
When all was sooth
In one harmonious round
Of diapasoned sound
In the full orbit of unsullied youth.
For now, alas! is lost the gift
Of paradise, and leap the swift
Raucous years headlong
Tumbled and broke among
The splintering rocks,
Where time's river shocks
Against the bitter sea
Of eternity.

I would return to thee,
Season of innocence
And that fresh joy, whence
Sounded clear the sweet accord
Of life's primeval word,
Deep music in far places stirred,
When heavenly fingers swept the trembling
chord

Y O U T H

For it is this
That makes the bliss
Of youth, and renders fair,
To the wide eyes of innocence,
All the ambient air
Of dawn in that intense
Clear light,
Burning a rose white
In the eternal morn beyond eclipse of night,
And, breaking through
The darkened circle of our blue,
Flashes in the eyes
Of youth with fires of paradise;
This the secret power
That clothes all earth with flower
Of beauty seen
Only in the sheen
Of that deep vision
Of the pure elysian,
Caught by the white soul of youth,
The unflecked mirror of the sun of truth,
Caught and given forth again
Into the blinded eyes of men,
Beauty's own celestial ray
Blotting out the light of common day,
And showering storms of glory o'er the beaten
way.

ASPIRATION

I can strike the minor chord and sing;—
Is the major chord denied?
I would sing with the sun, and chime with the
 moon
As it sways the heaving tide.

I would ride upon the neck of the blast
 Grasping the mane of the rack,
When the snorting thunder plashes his hoof
 In the lightning's ragged track.

Or where the battle thunders its bruit,
 There let the spirit pant,
When death and victory mingle their note
 In one triumphal chant.

I would mount to the topmost peak and ken
 With an eagle's sight afar,
Swoop to the depths and up again
 Across the path of a star.

Where myriad suns commingling blaze
 In the marge of farthermost space,

A S P I R A T I O N

And system in system clangorous rolls
Athwart the abyss's face,

Let my soul drink in the rushing song
Of a thousand worlds in one,
The music of time forever dying
And time forever begun.

On the wings of morning let me rise,
On the plumes of evening fall,
With the orient clang at the gates of sleep.
With evening unfold her pall;

And with the course of the chariot sun,
Let me follow the life of man,
With the eye of heaven looking upon
The great and the little plan.

For I would sing as an Angel might chant
Of all that he sees below,
When he gazes down on the whirling globe
With its human ebb and flow;

And, summing up in one great chord,
Bring the song to a perfect close,
As Dante's diapason blooms
In heaven's eternal rose.

POET AND BIRD

To sing a fleeting song and die!
What merit in a vagrant note
That flutters through an empty sky
On idly pulsing wings afloat!

Within the ocean wastes of air
No ear to catch its slender tone,
Along the wide savannah's glare
Into the seas of silence blown.

Or if some silvern drops of sound
From its slight stream should patter down
Upon the vast earth's glittering round,
In greening field or dusty town,

Who there would heed its fleeting dew
Drunk by the thirsty soil before
The sun has climbed the morning blue,
And life crept out from sleep's dim door?

Yet song is native to the bird,
That trills in heaven a buoyant stave,
Pouring his melody unheard
Upon the trembling ether's wave.

P O E T *and* B I R D

And native, too, the poet's note,
Though none to hear the distant song
Throbbing in regions far remote
From earth and its unheedful throng.

For Beauty has a secret grace
Bestowed in solitude alone;
Both bird and poet haunt the place
About the purlieus of her zone;

And, winging through the higher ways
Close to the levels of her throne,
There catch some fragments of her lays,
And sing the music as their own.

IN CIRCE'S DEN

Dullard and sot crammed full
Of the meat of the flesh,
Gross bulk ensnared and held
In the sense's mesh;

Fat chops replete fed
On the offal heap.
Munching a-hungered again
In the garbage sweep;

Epicure, bellied big,
Homed in the sty;
Snout stale with its ancient swill,
Bleared, piggish eye; —

Push and grunt at the trough
In Circe's pen,
Glut and roll and wallow
And glut again!

The poet's scorn upon you
Brutes of the sty;
Slaves of the trough and the swill,
Wallow and die!

In CIRCE'S DEN

Away! where nature is clean,
And breath of the breeze
Draws deep with light in the east
And morn in the trees!

Flashes the gossamer thread
Pearled with the dawn;
Silver soft shafts of Apollo
Gleam on the lawn.

Close night's golden eyes,
Pale wanes the moon;
Twinkle the feet of the day
In her white shoon.

Wakens a tumult of song
In forest green glades;
Silent off steals the dark
Through soft melting shades.

Faint comes a wind southing
Stirring the leaves;
Chequered shadow and sunshine
On the sward weaves.

Soul-stirring breath of the heaven,
Rich wind of the earth,

COLLECTED POEMS

Waking the heart to thy gladness
And nature to mirth;

These be the poet's dear portion
Afar from the den,
Where Circe sits watching her sty
And its swine, that are men.

ON THE DEATH OF ALFRED TENNYSON

Who took the laurel from the brow
Of him, who uttered nothing base,
And ever bore it in the vase
Of purity, O Master, thou,

Of virgin song, when round thee beat
The lustful rhythin of a time,
That welds false passion with false rhyme
Like some fierce Titan in the heat

Of unregenerate desire;
Thou, turning to sublimer spheres,
Made measure of the changing years
With chastest song, and, all afire

With vestal passion fed the flame
Of poesy with holy oils;
And kept unsullied from the toils
Of grosser things the hallowed name

Of poet. We who love thy fame
And follow still thy luminous star,
A beacon light beyond the bar,
Pray now for thee the sweet acclaim

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Of Avalon saluting there
Tumultuously the pure of heart,
Whose song e'er scorned the baser part,
And kept the lily's whiteness fair.

ARISE, AMERICA!

[On the occasion of President Cleveland's Venezuelan
Message.]

Arise, America!
Justice to freedom calls,
And freedom's mighty shout
Thunders answering out,
Shaking the brazen walls
Of a despot's quaking halls.

Arise, America!
Hark! Valour's quickening tread,
Through all your golden plain
Sounding from main to main,
Stirs e'en the glorious dead,
Who once for country bled.

Arise, America!
Rolls back time's misty night,
And lo! the heroic band
Wrests from fell England's hand
Freedom's sacred right,
Crowned on glory's height!

COLLECTED POEMS

Arise, America!
Ours the glorious meed
Of freedom, heaven-sprung,
God's youngest gifts among,
Won only by the deed
Of heroes when they bleed.

Arise, America!
Ours this sacred weal
To guard and ever hold
Against or arms or gold;
Swear it, as we kneel,
By the patriot's virgin steel!

Arise, America!
Better the desperate clash
Of war and goriest fight
Than justice cowered by might;
Better than despot's lash
Death by the foeman's gash!

Arise, America!
Twice England felt our worth,
Twice we smote her sore
And hurled her from our shore;
Twice shrunk her pride's vast girth,
Till freedom strode the earth!

A R I S E, A M E R I C A !

Arise, America!
Our valour still is true,
Our patriot blood still flows
Where freedom's banner blows;
Nor vain shall justice sue
Our arms to justice due.

Arise, arise!
Ye sons of freedom shout
Till the shaking heavens reply!
Flash the keen steel on high,
Swift gleaming roundabout
The foeman's panic rout!

Arise! Arise!
Sacred the cause, and just,
God our mightiest might,
Battling for the right,
Holding Freedom's sacred trust
Against a world's mad lust!

THE RAISING OF THE FLAG

Lift up the banner of our love
To the kiss of the winds above,
The banner of the world's fair hope,
Set with stars from the azure cope,
When liberty was young,
And yet unsung
Clarioned her voice among
The trodden peoples, and stirred
The pulses with her word,
Till the swift flood red
From the quick heart sped,
Flushing valour's cheek with flame
At sounding of her august sacred name!

Lift up the banner of the stars,
The standard of the double bars,
Red with the holy tide
Of heroes' blood, who died
At the feet of liberty,
Shouting her battle-cry
Triumphantly,
As they fell like sickled corn
In that first resplendent morn
Of freedom, glad to die
In the dawn of her clear eye!

The RAISING of the FLAG

Lift up the flag of starry blue
Caught from the crystal hue
Of central heaven's glowing dome,
Where the great winds largely roam
In unrestrainèd liberty;
Caught from the cerulean sea
Of midinost ocean tossing free,
Flecked with the racing foam
Of rushing waters, as they leap
Unbridled from the laughing deep
In the gulfs of liberty!

Lift up the banner red
With the blood of heroes shed
In victory!
Lift up the banner blue
As heaven, and as true
In constancy!
Lift up the banner white
As sea foam in the light
Of liberty;
The banner of the triple hue,
The banner of the red and white and blue,
Bright ensign of the free!

Lift up the banner of the days to come,
When cease the trumpet and the rolling drum;

COLLECTED POEMS

When peace in the nest of love
Unfolds the wings of the dove,
Brooding o'er the days to-be,
Peace born of freedom's might,
Peace sprung from the power of right,
The peace of liberty!

Lift up the flag of high emprise
To greet the gladdened eyes
Of peoples far and near,
The glorious harbinger
Of earth's wide liberties,
Streaming pure and clear
In freedom's lofty atmosphere!

Lift up our hearts to Him who made to shine
In heaven's arch the glorious sign
Of mercy's heavenly birth
To all the peoples of the earth,
The pledge of peace divine!
And let our glorious banner, too,
The banner of the rainbow's hue,
In heaven's wide expanse unfurled,
Be for a promise to the world
Of peace to all mankind;
Banner of peace and light,
Banner of red and blue and white,

The RAISING of the FLAG

Red as the crimson blood
Of Christ's wide brotherhood,
Blue with the unchanging hope
Of heaven's steadfast cope,
White as the radiant sun
The whole earth shining on!

THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM

O cruel manger, how bleak, how bleak!
For the limbs of the babe, my God;
Soft little limbs on the cold, cold straw;
Weep, O eyes, for thy God!

Bitter ye winds in the frosty night
Upon the Babe, my God,
Piercing the torn and broken thatch;
Lament, O heart, for thy God!

Bare is the floor, how bare, how bare
For the Babe's sweet mother, my God;
Only a stable for mother and Babe;
How cruel thy world, my God!

Cast out, cast out, by his brother men
Unknown the Babe, my God;
The ox and the ass alone are there;
Soften, O heart, for thy God!

Dear little arms and sweet little hands,
That stretch for thy mother, my God;
Soft baby eyes to the mother's eyes;
Melt, O heart, for thy God!

The BABE of BETHLEHEM

Waxen touches on mother's heart,
 Fingers of the Babe, my God;
Dear baby lips to her virgin breast,
 The virgin mother of God.

The shepherds have come from the hills to adore
 The Babe in the manger, my God;
Mary and Joseph welcome them there;
 Worship, O soul, thy God!

But I alone may not come near
 The Babe in the manger, my God;
Weep for thy sins, O heart, and plead
 With Mary the mother of God.

May I not come, oh, just to the door,
 To see the Babe, my God;
There will I stop, and kneel and adore,
 And weep for my sins, O God!

But Mary smiles, and rising up,
 In her arms the Babe, my God,
She comes to the door and bends her down,
 With the Babe in her arms, my God!

Her sinless arms in my sinful arms
 Places the Babe, my God;
“He has come to take thy sins away;”
 Break, O heart, for thy God!

LOVE SOLE

I know the shibboleth that slips
So oily from unctuous lips,
Philanthropist to finger-tips;

The modern Pharisaic brood
With babble of the general good,
And shallow cant of brotherhood.

Theirs but the mock of love, the weed
And bramble of degenerate seed,
The face, but not the heart, indeed.

This truth is truth since man begun:
True love begins and ends in one;
The love of all is love of none.

'Tis false we love the general man;
True love is mightier, vaster, than
The fetich of the common Pan.

Centred within the single soul,
Love finds the cycle of its whole,
The first swift impulse and the goal.

LOVE SOLE

Not in the blurred and vulgar mind
Does love its hallowed image find,
But in itself divinest kind.

And rooted thus in single good,
Scatters the blessings of its mood,
And blossoms unto brotherhood.

THE BURDEN

Let night shut out the cares of day,
Blot out the sense of wrong,
And in the bath of slumber steep
The soul, till it grow strong.

Then, waking with the coming light,
Arise, and go thy way,
Leaving the burden to the night
That bent thee yesterday.

HOW POETS PLAY

How do poets play?
Of their own souls
Making psalteries,
Whose music rolls
Toned to the vibrant ray
Of interstellar harmonies;
There lightnings involute
With lightnings, shoot
Athwart the flagrant spaces of the day,
Till sound ensheathed in sound,
Music in music drowned,
Flooding the still depths round,
Swoon in fainting silences away.

THE LOWER BOUGH

Rest on the lower bough,
Whose wings are frail,
Nor seek the riotous tops
Lashed by the gale.

Let not ambition tempt
To flutter where
The eagle's iron wing
May scarcely dare.

All native to the sward
And leafy shade,
Thy slender treble fills
The quiet glade.

But in the upper gale
Thy little sound
Were like a rose-leaf reft
And blown around,

Or in the solitude
Of height on height,
The flickering of a spark
Within the light.

HEAVEN

MOTHER

A little child, a little child
With childish prattle at my knee:
I did not know how near was Heaven,
And now how far is Heaven from me.

FATHER

Nay, nearer now, since Heaven holds,
As hostage of our plighted love,
The child that Heaven gave, and took
To show true Heaven is all above.

CARMEN NUPTIALE

O happiest kalend in the count of time!
I lift my voice to sing thy golden hour:
Of all thy circling sisters, from the prime
Of Eve's chaste nuptials in the sacred bower
Of paradisial innocence and love,
Than none less gracious shalt thou prove.
Thy brooding moment holds all future days,
As in the tender egg of nesting dove
Lies the sweet hope to-come, warmed by soft rays
From love's own heart, and only pleased to bring
Life to its joyous spring.
Mark this most blest amongst all time's compeers;
Of past pursuit the now accomplished goal,
The happier dawn that lights the wakened soul
To vaster regions in the round of years,
To larger hopes and dearer fears;
Till love outgrows all measured marge and leaps
The rim of time to God's eternal deeps!

SONNETS

RETROGRESSION

[The United States declared war against Spain for the
liberation of Cuba.]

We gave a solemn pledge, and called on Heaven
To hear; our arms, we swore, were Freedom's
own,
To Freedom consecrate, and her alone;
Our valour sprung from her chaste bosom, given
To Freedom's cause forever; and her levin
We forged upon the footsteps of her throne;
Her sword unclasping from her zone,
She placed within our hands, and blessed us
shriven.

O solemn mockery of her holy trust!
Our troth forgot and slaked our noble zeal,
Our brittle honour shattered in the dust!
A riotous people drunk with conquest's lust,
In bacchanalian rout we onward reel,
And 'gainst her turn her own ensanguined steel!

THE POET'S FANE

Stop! Come not anear the poet's fane
Without the poet's robe of love; the spot
Is sacred, red with sanctities of pain,
That blossom flower-wise in a garden plot
Fed by the tilth of grief and weeping rain;
Poor flowerets dashed with sorrow's purple stain,
Out of love's youthful shyness first begot,—
Save with compassion's hand touch thou them
not.

But, if the mellowing grace of sympathy
Wells as a kindred fountain in thy heart,
Pour out the generous flood,— stand not apart
Enstranged; shower down thy golden charity,
And, fed by that great largess, thou shalt see
These drooping flowerets bloom in majesty.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE BABE

I

How strange when thou wert not, a life to-be!
Nor ready fancy playing fondly drew
Thine unguessed lineaments in shape or hue,
Wrapt in the womb of possibility,
Where silence brooded o'er the darkened sea
Rolling a soundless tide; nor hint nor clew
Was murmured from that voiceless deep, nor
blew
A message on the winds to tell of thee.

We know not whence, but like a sudden light
From darkness flashing out, and all aglow
With radiant light, thy being burst to flame!
But now the unseen held thee from our sight,
An unborn mystery, undreamed — and lo!
Love called, and thou didst answer to thy
name.

II

Sweet mystery, thou living soul with eyes
To gaze upon the shifting scene that plays
In ceaseless change about life's narrow ways,

COLLECTED POEMS

And wondering gather 'neath the circling skies
The fleeting, variant image as it flies,
 While time with nimble shuttle weaves the days
 Around thine unconcernèd head, and lays
His glittering thread athwart thy destinies;

Echoes of life around thee come and go
 Unheeded, like the muffled sounds that fill
 The lonely watches of the central deep,
When midnight bends aloft her sable bow,
 And feathered silence falls around, as still
 As utter peace and quiet as dreamless sleep.

THE SONNET

I

Within the sonnet's glittering limit lies
The diamond's royal fire, Wordsworthian verse
Wedding high thought with noble music, terse
With wisdom; there the opalescent dyes
Of love-light from a Petrarch's brimming eyes;
The luted plaint that chastened Dante's curse;
Miltonic echoes organ pealed, the nurse
Of solemn sounds brought down from midnight
skies.

It measures with the royal tread of kings,
And treasures wealth too precious to be hid
In wanton rhymes and idly footed lines;
Or upward soaring, as an eagle, wings
Its way to empyrean calms amid
The tuneful silence of the topmost Apennines.

II

They say the sonnet is a narrow pale,
A little garden straitly hedged around
Where only slender flowerets may be found,
But no brave blossom lusty with the gale

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

And the untempered sun; and in its bound
Pale poets gently pipe in plaintive sound
The sifted sweetness of love's distant bale
On reeds all murmurous of the underground.

Yet trumpet tongues have found swift utterance
here
And freedom loosed her fiery-hearted levin,
And earth has trembled with the solemn fear
Of harmonies breathed from the stooping
heaven
E'en in this slender compass closely pent
A master's voice may shake the firmament!

ANARCHY

[The Empress of Austria was assassinated by an anarchist in Geneva in August, 1898.]

Red hand, black heart, beast with the dragon's face;

Thou hundred-headed horror breathing death
And dole across the fair world's rounded space,
Blurring the wholesome sun with tainted breath,
Back to thine ancient slime, blind whelp of wrath!

Amid the dragons of the prime, thy place;

Thy law the lust of tooth and claw; thy path,
Like Lucifer's to gaping Hell's embrace!

Black heart, red hand smiting her queenly breast,
Thinking in rabid rage to rend the law,
Blind as the snarling tiger in his quest

For prey; from her spent blood shall Justice draw

Swift strength to hurl upon thy viper's nest
The outraged nations' deep anathema!

VANITAS VANITATUM

I

Is life as empty as the poet sings
In lamentation o'er the shattered days
That strew the banks of time, and mark our
ways

With the sad wreckage of the hopeful springs,
That promised golden havens, when the wings
Of joy expectant flashed empurpled rays
Athwart the far horizon's golden haze,
And lured us on with her soft glamourings?

Alack! the mask upon the countenance
Of time to cheat us with the teasing thought,
That he abides eternally, perchance;
Till we like eager searchers, who have sought
A fleeing form through all the giddy dance,
Find 'neath the mask the eyes of Death in-
wrought.

VA N I T A S V A N I T A T U M

II

Can it be true that time is but a breath
Of nothingness, a shadowy film that lies
Upon the senses steeped in carnal dyes,
That bleach before the stinging touch of death;
A moving vanity with faded wreath;
An empty image mirrored in the eyes,
As shadows in salt pools from shallow skies,—
Life a pale ghost, the grave an empty sheath?

O bitterness to sour the unfound sweet,
The sweet pursued with ever-quicken^g chase,
And still pursued, yet ever found more fleet;—
Hasten, O Soul, hasten thy hurrying pace!—
Alas! thou'rt still a laggard in the race,
Though shod with lightnings were thy rushing
feet!

LOVE'S FRUIT

There was a little life that beat from mine,
A little hand that clasped my hand, and eyes
That looked in mine with all love's mysteries,
So deep, so true, so tender, so divine,
That I could read therein the lucent sign
Of heavenly things that speak not human wise,
But find their utterance in the distant skies
Where far withdrawn God's holiest secrets shine.

And though my heart is bruised, and all my soul
Quivers with pain, in patience I abide
The grief that shadows all the world with gloom:
I know that loss and grief are not the whole
Of life, that Love is not Death's barren bride,
But bears immortal fruit within her womb.

MARCH

Uproarious month! Spent winter's dying wrath,
Howling across the waste and charging down
Upon the groaning woodland's shrieking town,
Lashing the helpless boughs, and in thy path
Scattering thy spoils in hapless aftermath; —
Blow, blow thy spirit's turbulence, and frown
Thy darkest from the sullen skies, and crown
Thy war with all the rage that winter hath!

Thou stormy image of the turbid soul
Swollen with winter of its barren pride,
The monstrous lion of anger roaring there
With raucous breath and rending all the air
With fearful bellowings, that rush and roll
Mad whirlwinds heaping ruin far and wide!

APRIL

Half fearful, half in joy, with tearful eyes
Thou comest little maiden, tender bride,
Timid but loving by the bridegroom's side,
Thy feet reluctant to the path that lies
Before thee under half encloaked skies;
Yet in thy heart emboldened to confide
In him who leads thee as thy constant guide
To the rich blooms of love's full paradise.

Cast out all maiden fear, thou little wife;
The way before thee broadens into light
And deepens into all the flower of May;
With thee is promise of the coming life,
The glowing hour of Summer's rounded height,
The golden glory of deep Autumn's day.

CHRISTUS TRIUMPHANS

I

Mors Victor

Before thy grisly front no man may stand;
No heart but quakes at sounding of thy feet;
Thy coming none may flee, though ne'er so
fleet,
And trembling earth confesses thy command.
From kings their crowns thou pluck'st and from
the hand
Of Power its scepter; thou mock'st the vacant
seat
Of Pride or Love; nor high nor low degree may
cheat
Thee of thy tribute, Lord of sea and land.

Dreadful art thou, and terrible thy power
Against our piteous frailty doomed to die!
Weakly we lift our fending hands in vain,
And crouching wait the inexorable hour,
The thunderbolt of thy dark sovereignty
To smite and blast us with its mighty pain!

COLLECTED POEMS

II

Mors Vida

Babes now may smile into thy sunless eye
And fear thee not, prone in thy kindred dust;
No longer reck we thine insatiate lust
Of this our crumbling brief mortality.
Time is our bound no more; this narrow sky
Metes not our vision; vaster is our trust
Than all the regions of thy moth and rust,
Since passing now we know we do not die.

For risen is our Christ, and with Him we;
And prostrate thou beside His open grave,
O Ancient Victor in thy first defeat
And everlasting! Smiling now we see
Thou art but shadow with a broken glaive,
Within thy futile hands His winding-sheet.

SONNET SEQUENCE

I

I care not what the colour of her hair;
Her beauty cometh not from dark or fair:
For round her head Love's haloed glories throw
A luminous light more soft and brilliant far
Than on the evening's front its tender star
Burns clear above the sunken sun below.
I never saw the colour of her eyes;
I only care to know that in them lies
A limpid depth that melts before the gaze
In softer deeper lights expanding clear
Into the soul's intenser atmosphere;
And there I worship uttering praise
To God's high craft, that he has made to shine
Such wondrous beauty in so fair a shrine.

II

Love never jests, though in his words at times
He seems to laugh in folly's motley mood,
And like a fool makes merry with stale rhymes
To jangle down the plaints of solitude.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Alas! his mirth is but a mask to hide
The gnawing fire that 'neath this mummery glows;
Though all seem fair upon the outward side,
Within there dwell a host of warring woes.
Despair with pallid front now seeks to drive
Hope from the citadel, who fain would stay;
And so these two in war contending strive,
While gentle Love stands trembling at the fray:
Come thou, fair Queen, and end this cruelty,
For Love allegiance owes and pays alone to thee.

III

What is to love? Let Love the answer give:
It is to lose thyself, thyself to die,
And yet in dying find that thou dost live;
To spend thy being's breath upon a sigh,
And draw all joy where mostly thou dost grieve:
Yet in the breathing of thy life away
New life, more life the fond soul seems to gain;
And though each hope that comes, refuse to stay,
For all that go, a budding host remain.
To love is both to die and live again;
Unto thine other self thyself to give,
Surrendering all the good that thou mayst hold,
Losing thyself to find a hundred-fold,
The lesser yielding that the greater learn to live.

SONNET SEQUENCE

IV

What pain for love will not the heart endure!
The heaviness that comes of fell despair,
The agony of hopes that vain allure,
And in the seizing vanish in thin air,
Like desert images unto the eyes
Of one, who sees a flowering paradise
Along a stretch of placid waters cool,
Where shades of palm shield off the burning ray,
And yielding turfs beside a limpid pool
Invite to rest forever and a day —
An empty mirage by a barren way.
As one all desolate in lonely lands,
Cries out and prays with weak uplifted hands,
From this sad waste to thee I cry, O Love, and
pray.

V

When she's not near, then pleasure flies my life,
And misery and I sit down and moan,
And make a sad complaint like man and wife,
Who bear Love's chains when Love himself has
flown.
And when I think of all her presence is,
And then do reckon all the gain I miss,—

COLLECTED POEMS

The dead dull night for want of her clear eyes,
The scentless air for lack of her sweet breath,
The absent music of her fond replies,—
Life's emptiness is but the ghost of death.
An exile from the happy light, I brood
Upon the bitterness my soul now tastes,
In desolation worse than desert wastes
Or polar fields of starless solitude.

VI

What offering shall I make unto my love,
What worthy treasure lies in my slight store?
When I do count its slender contents o'er,
Alas! its poverty does only move
To tears, that I should find myself so poor:
Mine not the glory of great deeds in war,
Mine not the laurel of poetic brows,
Mine not the lustre of the civic star,
Nor any meed that sparing fame allows; —
How rich in worth is she, how poor my house!
All wealth of glorious deeds at her dear feet
I deem an offering only just and meet,
And I, O grief! my empty hands uplift;
Alas! what hope may be for me who have no gift!

SONNET SEQUENCE

VII

Enclasped in thy dear thought, O sweet Love,
hold
Me innermost and highest influence,
As dwells within the rose-leaves' tender fold
The subtle life that breathes most sweetly thence
Its fragrant beauty to the raptured sense.
Ah, soon the gentle life of flowers will die,
And into nothingness their beauties fade.
But Love is an eternal gift, and I
With it would always live, immortal made
In its sweet largess. Then unto thine eye
Let me be chiefest light, and colour give
To all else thou mayst see, and all delight
Of living make for thee; for life is light,
And I would be the light that makes thee live.

VIII

In full effulgence flood the world with light,
O Sun, thy fiery course soon run and die;
And on fleet-footed flying steps, O Night,
Wheeling thy million fires in haste pass by;
Haste, Life, and breathe this lingering day away,
As frozen breath upon the winter air,

COLLECTED POEMS

That suffers for the instant swift delay,
But melts ere eye has time to trace it there;
Or else with dreamless opiate come, O Sleep,
And shutting out this slow-paced lapse of things,
In deepest slumber this sad present steep,
Until the morrow all its promise brings:
So would I cheat slow Time, who now cheats me,
And holds me bond, where Love alone can make
me free.

IX

And why should I be born to change and chance,
Evil's rebuff and good things gone askance,
Time's tortuous doubt and Fortune's circum-
stance?
Pursuing visions Hope has made to snare,
Loath prisoner to watchful jailer, Care,
Lost victim of inquisitor, Despair!
In vain succession seeking permanence,
Emphantomed by the fleeting ghosts of sense,
O sliding Life, what barren recompense!
The Present from the Future borrowing blood,
The Past forever tombing present good,
All parts of Time a thieving brotherhood!
Yet let my Love but look with her bright eyes,
And all this desert blossoms into Paradise!

SONNET SEQUENCE

X

I ask thee for thy love, but it must be
In hearts that give and take this gift most blest
Of all that dwell within the human breast,
Sweet interchange of mutual liberty;
For love is no true gift, save it be free.
And if of freedom it be not possest,
I ask it not; for I am as a guest
Who but receives as thou mayst give to me.
Then say that we together shall abide
As host and guest within Love's sacred home,
Each gaining freedom in the other's gift,
Each yielding up the loneliness of pride,
I never more in barren ways to roam,
And thou no more on stormy seas to drift.

XI

MIZPAH

Though Ocean 'twixt us pour its watery war,
And soaring mountains frowning barriers rear;
Though Time divide by an unceasing year,
And Space with all its utmost limits bar,
Yet in His watching ever art thou near,
And I from thee can never be afar.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

And Love, that built this universal frame,
And thy sweet heart that beats all love for me,
Breathes benediction in that holiest name
Of love with promise of eternity.
So sealed by that dear bond we twain shall go,
Unsundered by the walls of Time and Space,
Together through the sounding pass of woe,
Till that high Love look on us face to face.

THE DEATH OF SIR LAUNCELOT

*“So groaned Sir Launcelot in remorseful pain,
Not knowing he should die a holy man.”*

TENNYSON.

THE DEATH OF SIR LAUNCELOT

At Canterbury seven years a monk
Sir Launcelot had abode. For Arthur passed,
And all the goodly fellowship of knights
Broken and scattered through his mighty sin
With Guinevere, he sought to purge his guilt
By prayers and fasting and the biting scourge
Within the holy life, till chastened love,
Freed from the clogging dross of earthly passion,
Leap a shooting flame upward to Heaven.

Seven years he there abode, and ever grew
To holier ways in spiritual might
As great as erst his prowess in the lists,
When first amongst the knights he overthrew
All comers in the jousts and won the prize.
And there he learned the smallness of his fame
And all the greatness of his sin with power
To drag down Arthur's mighty realm to ruin.
And from the bitterness of that vast grief
He fed his soul with constant tears to bloom
In penitential fruits, for he was come
To be a holy man with gift to see
That time is shadow of eternity,

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

And all the uses of our mortal hours
But vanity, save as the generous seed
Sown for the reaping in high heaven's demesne.

And so Sir Launcelot waxed in holiness;
And from the ashes of his sinful past
Stirred by the ceaseless breath of penitence,
Blew, first, the fainting spark of higher love,
And last, the glowing fire, whose lambent flame
Eat out the grossness of the carnal will,
And, then, with ardent tongue aspiring leaped
To union with celestial fires, whence came
The heat and quickening of its swift desire.

And in the furnace of that inward love
The man was changed beyond all mortal knowing;
For he had dwined away to ghostliness,
Until the shining spirit burned and glowed
Through flesh and bone worn to translucency.
And all his face shone like Sir Galahad's,
Who saw the Holy Grail, and like to hers,
The virgin sister of Sir Percival,
Who sent the deathless ardor of her eyes
In Galahad's, and made her virgin purpose
One with his virgin will, forever wed
To chastity and to the higher life,
Till caught up in an ecstasy he passed

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Beyond, in vision of the Sacred Cup.
But Launcelot came to holiness by penance,
Like stubborn ore seven times over passed
Through the refiner's fire, till it come forth
Pure golden, purged of all its earthiness
And alien dross. For many ways has God
To draw His creature to Himself, and steep
It in the gracious furnace of His love:
Some as Sir Galahad through innocence,
Whose white flower blossomed from his cradled
years,
Some as the holy nun through human love,
Which rooted first in man's frail faith withered,
But after grew to fruit in heavenly soil;
And some as Launcelot through the dolorous way
Of penance cleansing all the sinful past
With prayer and fasting, till this mortal house
Grow luminant with grace, and in the eyes
The Spirit shines with love's interior flame,
Like windows glowing with an inner light
From out an ancient hall, wherein they hold
High feast for coming of their absent lord,
After long years of exile from his hearth.

For after that great battle in the west,
Where Arthur smote the traitor Modred down,
And wounded sore was borne by Bedivere

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Down to the margin of the sleeping mere,
And went into the barge that hovèd there,
And passed with those three hooded queens, who
holped

The fainting king unto the happy isles,
Sir Launcelot, heavy with the grievous word,
Came back from over seas, and sought the queen
At Almesbury, whither she had fled the wrath
Of Arthur, knowing not the king would come
To bless her with forgiveness, not to bane.

And there to be a holy nun the queen
Abode and clothed herself in black and white,
As nuns are wont, veiling her beauty's fire
With weeds of penance, as evening's ardourous
star

Burns all enclouded in the vapourous west,
When heaven weeps a dying day of autumn,
Sinking behind grey banks of broken storm.

And hither over seas Sir Launcelot came,
When Arthur passed and bold Sir Gawain died;
And sought the queen, thinking within his heart
Old thoughts, that came and went and came again
Like sudden birds on winter's leafless boughs
Chattering a noisy chorus for the food
They find not, locked within the whitened land

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Forgetful of the summer's lavishness.
And so the memories of the summer hours
Came fluttering in the winter of his grief,
Where all was barrenness, and found no place
Of solace for the bitterness of joys
Long past, remembered sweets but present pangs.
And all the glamour of his fame died out
Within his heart and lay in dust and ashes,
Like fires gone out within a wasted land.
And making lamentation for his sin,
His soul grew black as death with gathering pain
At seeing the vast emptiness of life
Wrought in the vanity of things long passed;
And all the shadows of his vanished days
Trooped mockingly before him as to say:
"Behold the wraiths of thine own deeds misdone,
And all the hollowness of time misspent."
And pointing ghostly fingers at him, jeered
Accusingly, and beat him down in shame.
And what of good and pure he once had wrought
Drew back affrighted, wailing at the strength
Of evil deeds grown old with years of custom.

And so as in a swoon Sir Launcelot lay,
Sunk in the blackness of that ghostly night,
Unrecking time and all the world about:
And from the dripping east the sunless day

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Rose heavily, and wheeled a clouded arc
Through weeping skies down to the shrouded
west,
And sank in darkness, o'er the world's blurred
rim.
And the bare woodland's leafless limbs made moan
With requiem winds dirging the dying year,
That, whistling through the empty rookeries,
Shrilled ghostly music in the abbey towers.
But Launcelot lay and heeded not, lost
Within the deeper night that whelmed his soul;
Till on the second day the abbey bell,
Clanging its noisy message o'er the walls,
With sudden onset smote his startled ear,
And roused his smothered soul from out its swoon,
While through the wakening senses poured the
tides
Of life in rushing streams of sight and sound.

Then rising up Sir Launcelot strode a pace
And reeled with giddiness, but onward pressed
And stood before the abbey's massy gates;
And thereon smiting with his hilted sword,
The startled corridors grew clamourous
With replicated echoes rumbling far
Like distant thunder through the cloistered cells,
And into solemn silence died again.

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

And hearing, Guinevere rose up and paused;
And all her heart went trembling through her
limbs;

But praying on high God she called to stay
Her weakness, and in the sacred power of prayer
Gathered the scattered forces of her will,
Resolved against herself and him, who came
To plead against her better self and his.

Once only, for a little moment swayed
Her resolution, when she heard the craunch
Of armèd footsteps on the virgin flags,
Wavered a sudden instant, then rooted firm.
And Launcelot coming saw, and stood amazed,
Scarce knowing her; for all unlike the queen,
Whose beauty flashed of yore in Arthur's
court

From snowy arms of rounded perfectness
And shoulders purer than the lily's glow,
Crowned with a wanton wealth of sunny hair
Above the fulness of her columnned throat,
Her queenly stature rose before him robed
And veiled in solemn folds of black and white,
Her lustrous beauty chastened and eclipsed,
Yet temperately shining through her garb
Of soberness, as pearls a radiant moon
Behind a fleece of clouds illuminate
With hidden light.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

With broken voice at first,
Like brooklet hesitating over flats
And shallows, but gathering fuller flood and depth
At last flows smooth and strong through widen-
ing fields,
She spake to Launcelot sunken on his knee
In knightly courtesy: "Through thee and me,
Sir Launcelot, all the goodliest fellowship
Of knights the needful world has ever seen
Is utterly dispersed, and Arthur's work,
The building of a realm of love and law,
Wherein the man is lord of beast and lust,
And Christ is King (O blind was I not seeing!)
Is all undone; and treason, war and death
Have seized upon the realm and ravened it,
Laying the land all waste and desolate;
Till wolves now sniff the blackened hearth, where
men
Were wont to sit before their household blaze;
And all the fields lie choked with riotous weeds,
Where waxed the bearded grain laughing to
heaven
With plenty, sowed and reaped in Arthur's peace,
From shore to shore through lengthening year to
year.
Through me and thee hath all this ill been wrought;
For in our sinful love this grief has come

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Upon the land, and on us lies the dole
Of unpurged guilt, who sinned so easily
And erred so greatly, seeing now how deep
The wound we wrought so lightly, and how sore
The hurt, whence comes confusion and the death
To all that Arthur built so beautiful.
So wit thou now, Sir Knight, my soul's sad plight,
And how I seek God's pardon having hope
In Christ's high blood for my soul's after health,
And yet to see His Blessed Face through grace
Of God when I have purged me of my sins
In this quiet house of prayer, and laid aside
The frailty of this flesh through which I sinned.
For well I know in heaven is many a saint,
Who sinned as I, yet after won the height
By Christ's dear mercy and his precious blood.
Wherefore, Sir Launcelot, I beseech thee go;
Leave thou me here to work my penance out,
That rooting up the tares of time abused,
I sow celestial seed for heavenly gain;
For well as I have loved thee sinfully,
My heart forbids I love thee shamefully,
As once I loved forgetful of my place
And that high destiny wherein I failed;
And this I pray for thy soul's health and mine.
Farewell! betake thee to thy realm again,
And guard it well from war and wrack, and there

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Take thee a wife for joy and for an heir
To bear thy name and do thy work hereafter;
Till righted be the wrong of our misliving,
And from the ashes of the dolorous past
Push forth the blossom of a fairer hour,
In promise of the nobler fruit to come
Now blighted by the canker of our loves."

And Launcelot kneeling bowed his knightly head,
And felt his heart strain 'gainst his corselet's
girth,
Well-nigh to bursting with the swollen floods
Of grief surging and shocking in his ears
At thought of his unknightly faithlessness,
Made naked and ashamed by utter truth
Of her calm words accusing and accused.
And groaning answered Launcelot sore at heart:
"Would ye, sweet Madame, that I go again
Unto my country? Nay, I never shall;
Nor take me there a wife; for on high God
I call, that I in thee have ever had
Mine earthly joy, and false shall never prove.
Now wit thee well, I make a knightly vow,
That ne'er again in other shall I joy;
But that same choice which thou hast made, I
make;
And hence will seek the holy life to mend

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

My grievous past for Jesu's sake and health
Of mine own soul. For now I see full well
The mickle vanity of praise, and how
A suminer cloudlet puffed by wanton winds
Our slender hour of fame is blown and lost
Within the endless vaultage of the skies.
No more I seek the glory of the field
Or tourney's prize, a little dust of deeds
Raised by the fitful breath of jealous time
To settle back upon its native earth
In dust again beneath the heedless feet
Of men remembering not. And since, my Queen,
Ye have renounced the sounding world's rank
pomp

To seek the perfect way for Jesu's sake,
I one with thee in all that grievous past,
And knowing now the canker at the root
Of love that runneth not the course of God,
Must needs of right seek out the prayerful way,
And follow it with hope in Christ's high blood
Of sin forgiven and of pardon won.
Farewell! and I beseech thee let thy voice
Go up to heaven for me as mine for thee,
That seeing how we wronged high God together,
And each made other's hurt in either's love,
Together we may storm the citadel
Of His vast mercy, each in other's prayers

COLLECTED POEMS

Winning Christ's healing for the other's wound."
And saying Launcelot rose, and going passed
The abbey's massy gates, that closed behind,
And sent their muffled clang to where the queen
Stood, a statue marbled into grief,
Then like a fainting lily swayed and fell
Prone, till ministered by tender hands
Of holy women loving and beloved.

And Launcelot through the naked forest rode,
Like one who wanders witless in a dream,
Nor heeded aught the roar of lashing boughs
Tumultuous with tempestuous blasts icy
With winter and keen as fangs of famished wolves.
A day and night he rode, nor recked the way,
Till on the morning of the second sun
He chanced upon a hermitage, where dwelt
A holy man wasted with fasts and prayer.
And Launcelot there alighting knelt him down,
And crying out besought the holy man
To shrive him and assoil him, come to make
Amend to Heaven by penitence and prayer
For years of guilty love heavy with hell.

And knowing him the hermit blessed and spake
Large words of comfort and of Jesu's love,
And to his crying harkened shriving him;

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

And bade him strip him of his shining mail;
And on him placed the habit of a monk,
The sober garment of the world of prayer,
And token of the will to perfect life
In him who walks no more the paths of men
But treads the single way of Christ.

So dwelt

Sir Launcelot at the hermitage, a monk
In arduous striving for the perfect life.
And fierce at first the struggle with the flesh
Tyrannous with th' unbrooked sovereignty of
years.

And lean and hollow-eyed he waned ghost-like,
Wrestling against the might of evil habit
Grown stronger year by year as saplings grow
Ring by ring into the stubborn oak.
And beaten down a many times he rose
Again by strenght of prayer and penitence,
And slowly waxed in spiritual power.
Oft-times when heaven stood at middle night,
And all the world was laid in sleep, there came
Upon him half awake and half adream,
Soft phantoms wooing him with sensuous breath
To break his steadfast will and drag him down.
Anon Queen Guinevere bent over him
And swept his lips with velvet touch of hers,

COLLECTED POEMS

Or Vivien, her almond eyes half veiled,
From under drooping lids shot languorous light-
nings;
Or Queen Iseult tossing resplendent arms,
Her raven tresses streaming down about
The snowy drifts of gleaming shoulders, beckoned
And called with amorous parted lips breathing
The heavy sweetness of the ripened rose;
And Launcelot starting up and crying out
Beat 'gainst the hollow air with frantic hands,
And heard, or seemed to hear, a mocking laughter
Drifting away into the outer night
With muttered imprecations echoing back:
And on him stood great drops of agony,
Lest yielding, e'en in thought, he fall again
Into the noisome pit, whence he had toiled
To purer heights. And seizing on the scourge
That ever lay beside his hand, he smote
The recreant flesh and beat the lusty down,
And fell to prayer; till morning creeping up
The murmuring east noosed all the hills with light,
And wold and dale and all the shadowed woods
Silvered with benediction of the dawn;
And Launcelot, overwearied, kneeling slept,
And dreamed no more. And so at last he quelled
The flesh, and made it subject to his will,
As docile as his knightly charger once

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

To voice and rein in joust or roaring war.
Thus broken was the power of hell to weave
Foul phantasies before his dreaming brain,
Wrought from the sensuous vapours of the past,
Like lingering mists above a dark morass,
Until the sharp pure air of heaven blow
And drive the fetid shades away, and down
From crystal spaces shine the steadfast stars.

But one sole victory gaineth not the walls
Of Heaven, where battlemented gleams afar
The City of the Saints ruby with love.
And Launcelot longing for that distant glory,
As keenly as of old for human fame,
Strove mightily in prayerful contemplation
To win the flashing splendour of the height.

But God, lest he should lean upon himself
Forgetful that the soul is tempered true
Only within humility's black forge
Under the hammer of adversity,
As ruddy iron under the smith's swift blows,
Withdrew Himself, and left him desolate.
And Melancholy breathed her heavy night
Upon his soul, and leaden weighed him down
To an abysmal darkness void and stern:
And calling out in agony his voice

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Went from him echoless, and silence pierced
Him through and through like sword of ice numb-
ing

His speech and freezing all his powers of thought,
Save only the black memory of his sins,
That ever rose a creeping tide of foulness
To whelm him under; and isolation spread,
Deathlike, without the blessedness of death,
Innumerable spaces round about,
Until the universe seemed blotted out
Of time and place, and he, sole being plunged
In nothingness, shuddering in the void
Ravened by utter emptiness of self.

Then sudden seemed he snatched and lifted up
Within the grasping of some mighty palm,
And set down in a solitary waste
Of blackened sand and rock blasted of eld
By primal fires; and poured out like a pool
Of leaden waters lay his sluggish soul
Within a hollow of the barren plain,
So dun no star thereon could find its shadow,
Though all the heavens blazed with arrowy
lights.

A voiceless shade upon its banks he stood
Gazing with fearful eyes, that could not weep,
Upon the heavy surface of the pool,
That slowly stirred with sluggish undulations

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Oozing and bubbling up from slimy depths;
And therein creeping creatures foul with mire
Rose writhing twisted in a hundred knots,
Uncoiling serpent shapes that coiled again,
Flickering malignant tongues and hissing hate.
And from the distant gloom of circling sands
Came hollow laughter, pealing mockingly,
And gibing voices shrilling as to say:
“Behold thyself, that thinkest to take high
heaven!”

And 'twixt the wriggling horror of the pool
And those shrill voices seemed he plunged in hell,
Cast out of Love and doomed of God forever.
Nor could his tongue find utterance, nor prayer
Wing upward from his heart in utter shame
Of his unworthiness, seeing his soul
Spilled out in all the foulness of his sins.
And so he seemed to stand eternally,
Helpless and hopeless, scorned of Heaven and
Hell.

Then sudden on the far horizon shone
A little light that grew resplendent coming,
And growing flung lances of fire across
The sands scattering the shadows of the waste,
Till all the pool was silvered into white;
And looking, he beheld it crystal pure!
And all the air glowed red with crimson flame,

COLLECTED POEMS

That wrapped him close and ravished him with
sweetness;
While round him swept the radiance of a host
Charging as from a leaguered city's walls
To rescue of a fallen knight begirt
By hurtling foes; and in the crystal pool
Behold — its gleaming towers and turrets mir-
rored —
The city of God rose-red! And all its walls
Were thronged with aureoled saints shouting
Hosannas,
And waving golden palms; and parapet
And base, and all the glowing space between,
Builded of serried ranks angelical,
Arm linking arm and wing enfolding wing,
Breathed harmonies of blended canticles
Flaming like fountained fire, that spouted forth
Rivers of rushing melody flooding
Swift light leaping in seas of glory,
Till height responsive unto height trembled
With song of all the Sons of God crying,
“Behold the Love that conquereth forever!”

And Launcelot by that splendour pierced and
rapt,
Was lifted from the night of desolation,
And made to shine in spiritual glory

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Upon the heights of holiness, and knew
His mighty sin forgiven and Heaven won
By utter gift of God, who casteth down
And lifteth up out of pure love to win
His creature to Himself.

And ever after

The vision of the City of the Saints
Abode within him, shining in his eyes
With holy flame and lighting all his face
With love, till they that looked upon him, mar-
velled.

And as a music playing was his presence,
Making glad harmonies with all about,
Till savage beasts ate gently from his hand,
And birds came fluttering round him lovingly;
And when he passed the rose flamed deeper red,
Unfolding all her heart and breathing out
A richer perfume to the joyous air;
So great was love within him shining forth.

And when Sir Bors, and others after him,
Came seeking Launcelot, finding him a monk
They marvelled greatly seeing him so changed.
But by the deathless fire allured, that burned
Celestial beacons in his eyes, and held
By music of his voice that seemed attuned

COLLECTED POEMS

To heavenly choirs, they would not forth again
Into the discord of the world: and won
Through Launcelot to the love of higher things,
Abode with him and took the ashen garb
Of penitence; and following Christ alone
Strove ever for the perfect life; and so
There gathered round him seven knights, who erst
Had followed him and worshipped him; and now
They followed him no less, but worshipped God
Alone, by his ensample drawn and led.

And now the seventh year in heaven's orb
Had wheeled its round, since Launcelot sought
the perfect life;
And it was close upon the Easter hour,
When earth had cast her winter weeds aside,
And baring all her breast to wooing suns,
Felt slender flutterings of the baby spring
Stirring within her quickened zone, while field
And forest prescient of the coming hour,
Grew tender with the creeping sap tinging
The melting wold with hesitating green,
And softening all the boughs with timid buds.
And Launcelot granted by Heaven to know his
hour,
That he should pass at Easter-tide, calling
His seven brethren, spake in ghostly words

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

Clothed with the sad authority of death:
“Now ye who love me in the love of Christ,
Hearken my words, who am about to die;
For keen was I for earthly fame, loving
The incense glory from the lips of men,
Not knowing then the higher life in God,
Nor seeking Him, but serving mine own honour,
Encrowned by pride upon a throne of sand.
And lustng in the flesh I lived my life
Besottedly, and God’s high purpose turned
To basest use, making of human love —
Whence flowers our kind upon the stalk of time
For God’s own plucking in eternal life —
A sink of passion and a pit of death.
And sinning in the flesh with one that stood
Upon the pinnacle of mortal greatness,
Made sin a brazen trumpet to the world,
Till others from our scandal drawing license
Sinned also, blindly deeming that light fault,
Whose foulness borrowed lustre from high names.
And so the sins of many burdened me
Besides mine own, and weighed me down in
shame.
But God, who willeth not the sinner’s death,
Is mighty in His Love, whose arm is mercy
And reacheth out to snatch us from the hell
Our sin has made, if we but will to come.

COLLECTED POEMS

And I that hung upon the trembling brink,
Was plucked from those eternal gulfs of loss
By power of Jesu's blood spilled for us all;
And though unworthy, crying out was heard.
For marvellous the grace of God; and none
So low, but he may rise and live again,
Putting forth buds of righteousness by heat
Of that high Love falling upon the seeds
Of penance sown within the furrowed fields
Of humbleness; for pride resisteth grace,
And they that will not are as barren rock.
Wherefore in me see God's great miracle
Of Jesu's love triumphant over sin;
For none was greater sinner in the flesh
Than I, whose sin was more than lust, seeing
It grew to be the scandal of the realm,
And sapped the props of Arthur's house to ruin.
But God encompasseth the wickedness
Of men, and though we break His ordinance,
And send sin's discord through the groaning
world,
And see no healing of the hurt in time,
The arms of love eternally uphold,
And Mercy maketh music in the heavens,
That girdle us arround with harmonies
Unheard save by the spiritual ear
Beyond the lagging sense's evidence.

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

And he that feareth justice findeth mercy
With outstretched arms to take him to her
bosom

As mothers take the thirsting babe to breast;
But he that scorneth mercy and will not,
Within the hands of justice shall be held
Apart, eternally shut out from Love
Inviolate, that wooed him all in vain.

Wherefore that all who knew me in the weeds
Of worldliness, may see in me the flower
Of mercy burgeoning by Jesu's love,
I pray ye bear my body through the land,
When I am dead, to Joyous Gard, and there
Let all men come to look upon my face,
That seeing, they may know the ways of God,
And in the knowing some amend be done
For my great sin." And ceasing, quiet as waters
Flowing from shallows into deeps, his voice
Grew still, and o'er his face death's shadows crept
As daylight waning ashens into night;
And breathing deep in one long-drawn sigh,
As sleepers breathe, his soul went gently forth.

And kneeling all his brethren prayed high God,
And wept for love of him, and yet withal
Felt gladness, knowing him a holy man,
And how he longed for Heaven, not fearing death.

COLLECTED POEMS

Then rising up, with reverent hands they placed
Him on a bier, and going forth took road
To Joyous Gard.

And it was Easter-tide,
And all the earth had quickened into flowers,
And all the air was redolent of May;
And cope and copse rang revelry with songs
Of feathered joys awaked from winter's sleep
By new-born suns within the tender blue
Of skies liquid with spring's ethereal breath.
And through the joyous season as they went
The gladness of the world lifted their hearts
Thinking upon their risen Lord and death
O'ercome by his great victory, and how
The man they bore had won the eternal pearl.
And such a fragrance from him came as seemed
Death had no part in him, and on his face
A light as from a lamp of holy oils
Burning before the body of our Lord.
And all their going was a sweet spring tune,
Swelling from earth and air and blossomed brake:
Above the bier carolled the wheeling birds;
The little creatures in the grass chorused
A soft insistent note, and in the fields
The grazing kine lifted their patient heads,
And lowed a mellow greeting as they passed.

The DEATH of SIR LAUNCELOT

From thorpe and town the people came and gazed
At them, and wondering looked upon the face
Of him they bore, and seeing greatly marvelled,
And followed reverently: so when they came
To Joyous Gard, the multitude had swelled
Unto a host, as when a people come
In homage of a king. And in the quire
They laid him down, that all might come and see.
And noble lords and ladies came and saw,
And marvelled thinking on the grace of God.
And many that were still in sin were changed,
And followed Christ thereafter. And lastly came
Sir Ector, Launcelot's brother, making dole;
But when he saw his face he wept no more,
And straightway casting off his sword and helm,
He vowed him after to the holy life.

And now twice seven days Sir Launcelot lay
On loft, and all the people came and saw,
And none that came but marvelled seeing him,
And all the whiles his seven brethren sang
And read the psalters over him and prayed,
Their voices going up both night and day
Like incense from a golden censer swung.
And on the fortnight came the Bishop there,
And praying sang a requiem over him,
And offered up the Holy Sacrifice

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Of Christ's own Blood and Body for his soul;
And when the Sacred Host was lifted up,
Blood red it shone, and rosy sparkles flashed
Through all the quire, and sounds of voices came
From far off like a mighty host rejoicing,
Then died away as of a people going
Within a city's gates; and fading waned
The rosy red upon the chancel's walls
Like evening's purple with the setting sun.

AGLÁË

A DRAMATIC POEM

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

AGLÆ, a young Roman Matron.
BONIFACE, Steward of Aglæ's Estates.
CYPRIAN, a Christian Priest.
LAVINIA, Maid to Aglæ.
A BAND OF CHRISTIANS.

A G L A Æ

A DRAMATIC POEM

SCENE I

Atrium of Aglæë's house in Rome. A fountain playing in the centre. The Lares and Penates at the entrance on either side. Present: Aglæë and Lavinia. Lavinia weaving. Aglæë seated near by in a disconsolate attitude. Time: the beginning of the fourth century.

LAVINIA

Sweet mistress, thou art sad.

AGLÆË

"Tis strange, Lavinia:

I know not why, but all my soul sinks down
With sadness, and the spirit's airy wings,
That once stretched lightly in the irised sun,
Droop drenched and draggled now with constant
tears!

Why am I sad, when all else seems so glad?

COLLECTED POEMS

LAVINIA

'Tis hard sometimes to tell.

AGLÆD

It seems so strange
That I, whose years are crescent yet with youth,
When life and love are at their fullest tide,
Should feel as one whose pulses slow old age
Has laid his icy fingers on and chilled
Their ruddy currents into sluggish streams
Creeping through frozen channels.

LAVINIA

Perchance

Thou'rt ill and needst the doctor's care.

AGLÆD

'Tis not the body's ill that wounds me so,
But some distemper of the soul, that chills
And dulls the mirror of my joy. My heart
Is bared to autumn's melancholy winds
Complaining of lost summer's happiness;
My boughs are stripped of all their countless
blooms,
Whose flame once took the enamored air with
sweets,

A G L A E

And naked of their leafy loveliness
Serve but to catch the drooping heaven's tears
And weep them to the ground.

LAVINIA

Dear Mistress, this
Is only shadow of a little cloud
From humors of thy spirits overtaxed
With happiness.

AGLÆ

Am I not rich?

LAVINIA

In Rome none richer.

AGLÆ

Am I not loved?

LAVINIA

By all, dear lady, slave and freeman, high
And low. Kind is thy heart and lavish too.

AGLÆ

Withal so sad! For this I weep the more.
The largesses of fortune mock a heart
That misery holds in fee. 'Tis now a month
Since this strange jailer of my soul has stood
Cold sentinel upon my joy. Ah me!
Whence comes this gruesome witchery to filch
My happiness?

COLLECTED POEMS

LAVINIA

Yes, Mistress, well I know;
For thou wert wont to brim with gayety.

AGLÆDE

And I who never wept before now feed
On constant tears. It came not all at once
But rather stole upon me unawares,
Stealthily creeping like the salty sea
With bitter flood upon the sunny shore
Till all its pleasantness is overwhelmed.
And I, who took no count of careless time,
Save in the wingèd calendar of joy,
Now drag the listless days as slaves their chains
Gyved round their gallèd ancles. Lavinia!

LAVINIA

Mistress!

AGLÆDE

Rememberest thou that strange —

LAVINIA

Yes, lady!
That strange old man found fainting at the door
By Boniface?

LAVINIA

Oh, yes, quite well.

A G L A È

AGLÀË

Dost thou recall the man?

LAVINIA

Old and gaunt

Feeble and worn, a beggar —

AGLÀË (*with a gesture of impatience*)

No, not that

So much, for that was but the outward man;
But in his eyes despite his ragged woe,
A deep compelling calm serene as skies
Whose vaulted blue outspans all taint of cloud.
His aspect venerable, and his voice
Weighted with quiet authority, that seemed
Rooted in wisdom; strange his words; of things
More strange, that barbed my very heart, and
waked
Therein a fear I never felt before!

LAVINIA

Nay, I heeded not his words, dear Mistress,
Nor understood!

AGLÀË (*rising and much agitated*)

Within his eyes there shone
A sovereignty that awed the quickened soul,

COLLECTED POEMS

Yet merciful. He seemed to read my heart
As one who summons to a secret court
A culprit to be judged and yet to be
Forgiven. Me, a Roman matron too,
The mistress of a thousand slaves, whose word
Is weight of life and death upon her own,
This ragged beggar summoned and adjudged
As I were meanest of them all!

LAVINIA

Why,
Most humble was his mien and mild his speech!
I heard no word against thy nobleness;
Thy dignity endured no smallest hurt.

AGLÆ

Not in the outward marks that only take
The eye, the manner and the form of courtesy,
Was my nobility thus made ashamed;
But there, where is the proper of our pride,
Within the secret chambers of the soul,
Was I brought to my knees, a guilty thing
Not all condemned but somehow hoping still
For pardon!

LAVINIA

Strange were that, indeed, Mistress!
How could a Roman matron's great nobility
Be criminal, and who her judge but Caesar?

A G L Á È

AGLÁË

Thou art a simple child, Lavinia. Alas!
So too thought I until — (*weeping violently*)
LAVINIA (*throwing herself at Agláë's feet*)
Weep not, sweet Mistress!
It ill becomes the summer of thine eyes
To see them clouded so.

AGLÁË

Ay me! mine eyes
Are wells of grief for the sad heart's salt springs.
Yet in this weeping is a bitter ease
That softens, though it lessen not this woe.

(Enter Boniface)

BONIFACE (*pausing at threshold*)
(Aside) Agláë weeping! What portent in her
tears?
(To Agláë) Lady, I wait upon thy word.

AGLÁË (*starting*)

'Tis thou,
Boniface! I would speak with thee. Go,
Lavinia, child, and wait my further bidding.

(Exit Lavinia)

COLLECTED POEMS

BONIFACE (*approaching with anxious air*)

Thou weep'st Aglæë! My spirits take the chill
Of thy dear sorrow as the mirror dims
With sudden breath. Why droop thy spirits
so?

Tell me, Aglæë, the secret of this grief,
That I may share its dolorous tenderness,
Or else with careful hand may lift the flower
From off the thorn that wounds it so?

AGLÆË

Ah, me!
How may I tell! I feel, but scarcely know.

BONIFACE

Thy words were wont to be a very song;
Nor all the feathered music of the groves
Gave out more gladness to the ear.

AGLÆË

And now
Some nameless shadow creeps upon my soul
And silences its song. Alas, alas!
I've slipped the wonted moorings of my joy
And drift, a helmsless and a lonely barque
Into the widening waste of landless seas!

A G L A È

BONIFACE

'Tis but a passing shadow; some effect
Of weariness, that weighs thy spirits down.

AGLAE

In vain I seek to cast the burden off.
Pleasure is mockery, and shows of joy
Are only gilded robes, all lead to one
Whose heart keeps fast with hidden misery.

BONIFACE

Whence came this humor first?

AGLAE

'Tis hard to tell;
It came as winter comes in autumn's breath,
Gently at first, preluding deeper wrong
To summer's lustihood. And as the flower
First droops with keener nights, though all the
days
Be warm and tender still, upon me fell
The frosts that nipped the spirit's brighter bloom,
And plucked the petals from the stricken stalk.

BONIFACE

But is no record of the hour, no touch
In memory of time before and after
To mark the sunshine from the night that glooms

COLLECTED POEMS

Thy skies and shrouds the image of the stars?
For though the day die slowly into dark,
Nor fixed the instant in the thickening light
When we may say 'tis now the night, now day
Is spent, yet well we know the rounded hour
Of perfect light from utter gloom.

AGLÆ

Perchance

That day — Dost thou remember, Boniface,
The stranger succored by thee at the gate
And given shelter? He was old and worn,
A Christian speaking a strange doctrine.

BONIFACE

Yes,

His name was Cyprian.

AGLÆ

Then first in all my days
Was I rebuked and made ashamed!

BONIFACE

By Cyprian?

AGLÆ

By him!

BONIFACE

Dared he upbraid thee!

A G L Á È

AGLÁÈ

Not in words —

Nay, listen — thou shalt hear. Within his eye
There dwelt so clear a light, so deep a calm,
That I was drawn as one who gazes down
Into the ocean's depths, and sinks and sinks
Helpless from deep to deep. Then suddenly
The lambent shame rushed flaming to my brow
In presence of his soul, that held mine own
In that abyss where thought is tongueless speech,
Whiles all my guilt stood naked and ashamed
Before his questing eyes, that pitied me!
He read my heart, O Boniface, and saw
The guilty image of our love; and yet
He spake no word, but well I knew he knew!

BONIFACE

'Twas but the flaring fancy's painted fear,
A little grain of conscience sputtering up
In love's bright fire to burn itself away
In that resplendent flame like sudden chaff.
Why conjure phantoms in the broad bright day
And sadden with pale ghosts the laughing hours,
That wheel around the golden sun and strew
His path with flowers? We live and love; what
more

COLLECTED POEMS

Is given in this narrow house of time
To mortals? Let us take and spare not — Hold
The largess of the gods. All else is folly.

AGLÆË

Thy words were once bright fountains to my joy
And bore my spirits lightly up. But now,
Alas! they only feed my tears. 'Tis not
I love thee less, O Boniface, but I
Would love thee better. Love that knows its
shame
Is broken music on a guilty ear.
This knew I not before, but now I know.

BONIFACE

What is this riddle?

AGLÆË

None; but simple truth.
O Boniface, I am ashamed!

BONIFACE

Aglæë!

AGLÆË

I am all misery. I weep and weep,
And wonder at the ocean of my tears!
Some ghastly phantom shakes my frightened
heart,
A shadowy presence rather felt than seen,

A G L Á È

Faint syllablings like voices in far dreams,
Accusing whisperings that say no word,
Yet somehow speak a dreadful thing!

BONIFACE (*aside*)

Her humor blows a cold and heavy wind,
That quite congeals my nimbler spirits. How
Distract her mood?

AGLÁÈ

Knowest thou of Cyprian aught?

BONIFACE

How may I know? A beggar at the gate
He came unknown and like a beggar gone.
But shake thou off this heaviness; unfold
The crumpled petals of thy happiness
To brighter suns, and let them drink the mists
Of melancholy wept by tearful night.
Agláè, come; we'll fill the hours with love
Again, and in the crystal floods of joy
Drown this grim melancholy.

AGLÁÈ

No; 'tis not
The same. My love is heavy with strange fears
And cannot rise upon so fragile wings.
Perchance, if I might speak with him again,
That strange old man —

COLLECTED POEMS

BONIFACE

A ragged beggar!

AGLÆ

I know, and yet he seemed so wonderful!
He was as though some greater god had breathed
Upon his soul a more than mortal peace!
What are these Christians, Boniface? Knowest
aught about them?

BONIFACE

'Tis said they worship a dead god,
A Jewish malefactor crucified
By his own people long ago. Their rites,
I hear, are horrible. They sacrifice
A living babe, whose flesh their priests consume
Before the assembled worshippers!

AGLÆ

Most horrible indeed, and yet so strange!

BONIFACE

A dangerous, bloody and malefic sect,
They secretly conspire against the life
Of Caesar; and when seized and brought before
The Praetor, stubbornly refuse to burn
Incense to Caesar's statue!

A G L Á È

AGLÁË

Yet Cyprian seemed
Not so. Gracious and mild his mien. He spoke
Of peace and love to all. He said that thou,
Whose kindness succored him in need, would gain
Some precious great reward; for Christ, he said,
Loved the compassionate. I know not what
He meant, but in his words, there seemed to lurk
Some curious hidden sense, like a dim light
That makes the darkness deeper.

BONIFACE

Thou art bewitched,
Agláë! This strange old man has cast some spell
Upon thee, some strange charm brought from the
East;
For I have heard these Christians practise magic.
Their Christ, they claim, could even raise the dead,
And left the secret of his power to them
That follow him.

AGLÁË

Perchance 'tis true, and yet
I cannot think of Cyprian working ill
To me or other. Love so clearly spake
From eye and mien, and rang in every word,

COLLECTED POEMS

That malice surely could not mingle bane
With such fair honesty!

BONIFACE

Rather, Aglæë,
The subtlest poison in the rarest flowers
And in the precious wine the deadliest bane.

AGLÆË

I know not, Boniface; but this I know,
I am not what I was. I love thee still,
Yet other than I did. And all my soul
Is a fierce fire whose flame leaps ever up
Dying into the empty air and finds
No food for its aspiring tongue. What once
Was precious to my heart is ashes now
In that consuming heat; and I, who loved
The glittering raiment of the passing hour,
The lissome wantoness of clinging robes,
The light of jewels on neck and hand and arm,
The careless hour of feast and mirth, the wine
That flamed the cheek to roses and the eye
To love's own splendors, I, who loved the pomp
Of place, the pride of power, the luxury
Of wealth, till time seemed all elysian joy
That knew no end, find now the end of all.
The withered chaplet of a faded feast,
The years lie blanched within my trembling hands.

A G L Á È

Save only love of thee, O Boniface,
My life bears now nor leaf nor bloom.

BONIFACE

Some spell

Agláë, has enmeshed thy spirits quite;
Some foul, unwholesome incantation throws
Its fetid humors thwart thy fancy's eye.
'Tis most unnatural that youth and wealth,
Beauty and power, the very roots of love
And happiness, should wither in the sudden
And spread their branches barren to the sun.
And if some spell has bound thy spirits up
In such congealing frost, may we not find
Some counter charm to melt the opposing bonds?
I'll seek these Christians out, and find a magic
To loosen all the winter of thy woe,
And make thee smile again.

AGLÁÈ

A little warmth

Stirs in the ashes at the thought! Haste —
But whither? How?

BONIFACE

Most easily, I think.

The Christians here in Rome, so runs the rumor,
Made bold by Caesar's rash indulgence brave
The open day. I'll seek them out and learn

COLLECTED POEMS

Some way to wrest the secret of their skill.
I know one, Mincius, who, 'tis said, abjured
The superstition once before the Praetor.
Gold is his passion and will buy his tongue,
If fear or other thing should hold his speech.

AGLÆ

May the gods assist! Perchance there's hope in
this!
Yet am I all divided in my mind,
And in the feeble heart of my faint hope
Doubt sinks a bitter shaft.

BONIFACE

Then pluck it out!
And give thy fledgling chance to spread his wings!
I'll go and speed with Mercury's nimble feet
Upon thy quest! Nay, smile again, Aglæ; see
The sunlight on yon fountain's silvery shaft!
A happy augury! Its splendor breaks
And dances in a thousand flying lights
About us! On thy hair and face it plays,
Wooing thy beauty with amorous dalliance.
Smile,
Aglæ — now thou art thyself again!
Olympus would be brighter for thy smile —
I go to find thy happiness again!

(*Exit Boniface*)

SCENE II

Three months' interim between first and second scene. Atrium of Aglæë's house in Rome. Present: Aglæë and Lavinia.

AGLÆË (*holding a rose in her hand*)

The third month gone to-day, and yet no word!
Were months but petals, I'd crush them as this
rose!
How time does rack our patience on his wheel!
What can delay his coming back?

LAVINIA

'Twas far
To go, dear Mistress; over seas and mountains,
A rough way; Lucoë told me so,
For from Cilicia came she as a child.

AGLÆË

She said 'twas very far?

LAVINIA

Truly, and hard.
A long and tiresome journey over sea,
And then great mountains bar the toilsome way.

COLLECTED POEMS

"Twas many weary weeks, she said, 'twixt Rome
And Tarsus.

AGLÆ

"Tis very hard to wait.

Each moment is a weary while, each hour
A lengthened anguish, and each day so brimmed
To overflowing with the creeping flood
Of endless hours to make the stagnant round,
'Twould seem that time had ceased to flow.

LAVINIA

Think

Upon the journey's length, and measure time
By that. Mountain and river, sea and plain,
Make slow toil e'en for hastening feet. And then
The thousand various haps to make delay
In a long journey; on the sea the wind
May fall and hold the eager ship becalmed,
Or blustering storm may beat it baffled back,
Or angry torrents drown the wonted ford,
Or snow upon the mountain passes —

AGLÆ

Yes,

Too many far the petty hindrances
To pile delay a mountain high. To think
On these but sharpens appetite for haste,
And daily whets the edge of grief anew.

A G L Á E

This weighing all the hazards only adds
Fresh burdens to the staggering load I bear.
I conjure fears of all the thousand perils
That throng the hostile way and frighten hope.
The snows of patience cannot cool a heart
Afire; the ardor of my longing melts
Them all!

LAVINIA

But this impatience wears thee out.
Thou'rt grown so white and thin, a lily now
Would blush beside thy cheek, and zephyrs sway
Thee lightly as a blade of faded grass.

AGLÁE

A shadow of myself, I know. How soon
The body melts before the soul's desire!
How lightly are we made! The elements
That fashion our unstable frames are soft
And feeble, solving 'neath the touch of time
The ruder hand of grief or fortune's strokes
Like irised vapours in a biting wind.
I care not now as once I cared.

LAVINIA

Alas!

AGLÁE

Nay, sigh not so, Lavinia. My woe
Has taught me this — one precious pearl of gain

COLLECTED POEMS

From out the darkened waters of my grief — that
joy
Is not the body's gift, nor time may hold
The fee of happiness.

LAVINIA

But that is hard
To understand; where then may be our joy?

AGLÆÐ

O who may answer that? That precious wine
Once held for me within the shallow shard
Of time, is now all spilled. This much I know,
And for the rest I only hope, blindly
'Tis true, but firmly; why, I cannot tell,
But something whispers me from out my
darkness,
That Boniface will bring back peace and love
And happiness.

LAVINIA

May fortune prosper him,
And speed him quickly home! Yet thinkest
thou
A relic from a Christian's body slain
By Caesar's law will work so fair a spell?
'Twould seem to me that ill would come of ill.
These Christians are an evil people.

A G L A È

AGLÆ

Ah, yes, I know!
Yet Cyprian was a Christian, and he seemed
So gentle, kind. And Boniface declared —
For so did Mincius tell him,— that a cloth
Steeped in the blood of one who died for Christ —
For thus they speak — has power to cure the
sick,
The lame, the blind and e'en to raise the dead
To life again: I know not how, but Mincius said.
That he had seen such marvels wrought!

LAVINIA

'Tis strange
To think on! Theirs must be a potent magic.

AGLÆ

Though here in Rome the Christians go in peace,
'Tis known that Caesar's edict in the East
Pursues the obstinate, and many yield
Their lives for Christ their God.

LAVINIA

What fools! To think
That men would rather yield themselves to Hades
Than burn a pinch of incense to Caesar's statue!

COLLECTED POEMS

AGLÄË

Yet gladly do they die, 'tis said, and meet
The dreadful agony with smiles. Who knows
The secret meaning of their sacrifice?
Who welcome death so happily, as 'twere
A gift, must see beyond its bloody pale.

LAVINIA

But 'tis unnatural to welcome death,
Save as relief from hopeless misery;
And when to live is still a joy, then death
Is horrible!

AGLÄË

I know not what to think,
And yet I seem to half divine a meaning.

*(Singing in the distance. Listening they hear it,
but without being able to distinguish the words.)*

SONG

The martyr's crown is his; with Christ
Triumphant now he reigns:
Death he trampled under foot
And all its pains.

AGLÄË

He would not yield so willingly to death
Who had no secret stay within his soul
Against the pangs of nature's dissolution.

AGLAE

SONG (*approaching*)

Death but the happy gate to life
From out this vale of tears
To him who, lingering, longs for Christ's
Eternal years.

AGLAE

What is this singing in the street, Lavinia?

LAVINIA

I'll go and see

(Exit Lavinia)

AGLAE

"In Christ's eternal years!"

How strange the words! How solemn, yet how
glad
The burden of the music. What may it be?

SONG (*just outside the house*)

Nor craunching rack nor flaming brand
His steadfast will can break;
Sweet is the body's sacrifice
For Christ's dear sake.

AGLÆ

“For Christ’s dear sake!” These are the words of Christians!

COLLECTED POEMS

SONG

The golden palm within his hand,
The sign of victory won,
He sits enthroned among the saints,
Clothed with the sun.

AGLÀË

Who sings so strangely in the streets of Rome?
(*Enter Lavinia.*)

LAVINIA

Dear lady, there wait without a band of men
All garbed in white, bearing a body shrouded
In white upon a bier, and with them Cyprian.
'Tis they who sing.

AGLÀË

Cyprian!

LAVINIA

The very same.
He bade me tell you he would speak with you.

AGLÀË

Yes, yes, at once! Go, bid him come!

(*Exit Lavinia.*)

Cyprian!

How faint I grow! O who will stay me now!
This I have longed for all these weary months,
And now I fear and tremble!

A G L Ä E

SONG

O sweet the agony and trial
Sustained by love so great,
Beyond the power of man's weak will
And low estate.

AGLÄE

What subtle meaning in these curious words?

SONG

For Christ upon his own pours down
His all enduring grace,
And they that stand his witnesses
Look on His Face!

O sweet beyond all sweets to die
When summoned at His call
Sweeter than life to die for him
Who died for all.

AGLÄE

"Who died for all!" How strangely do I hear!
(Enter Cyprian.)
What mean these solemn words "Who died for all?"

CYPRIAN

Christ Jesus, Lord and God.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

AGLÄË

Cyprian!

CYPRIAN

Daughter.

AGLÄË

Thy words are very strange. Thou call'st me
daughter!

CYPRIAN

In Christ our Lord and God, who died for all.
His priest I bear His word of life to them
That hear me. Peace to thee, Daughter.

AGLÄË

Strangely and yet not strangely do I hear.
'Tis like the piercing of a broken dream!
Some shadowy prescience taking outward shape,
Yet vague. Speak, Cyprian, speak.

CYPRIAN

Daughter, I come
From Tarsus.

AGLÄË

Why, 'tis thither Boniface
Journeyed! Hast news of him?

A G L Ä E

CYPRIAN

Yes, Daughter, truly.

AGLÄË

I perish for it! Speak and succor me!

CYPRIAN

But first this golden prelude to the tale:
'Twill pave the way to happier things. Listen!

AGLÄË

With all my soul. But is he well?

CYPRIAN

Aye, Daughter, very well.

AGLÄË

I'm glad, so glad!

CYPRIAN

He sends thee greeting, and he bade me say
The charm he sought is found.

AGLÄË

E'en now I feel
Its power. I'm glad, so very glad!

CYPRIAN

A charm
Beyond all charms to heal our deadliest ills.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

But hear my tale, whose swift unfolding like
The flaming of the dawn upon the banks
Of night, will make thy darkness light.
When Boniface's pity succored me some months
Agone, and thy compassion joined
Made gracious healing of my weakened frame,
I prayed to Christ our Lord and God who died for
all,
To succor thee and him who succored me,
His servant — Nay, I know, my Daughter, all—
For Boniface confided all and bade
Me speak with thee. And passing hence I went
Into Cilicia, where the flock of Christ
Is harried by the wolves, to comfort them
Whom Caesar seeks to break unto his will
And force from their allegiance to their Lord.

AGLÀ

And there thou saw'st Boniface? Why comes
He not himself? What holds him?

CYPRIAN

Thou shalt hear.

In secret I administered to them
Who for their faith in Christ were seized by
Caesar;
For I was sent for this, and was not free

A G L Ä E

To court the blessedness of martyrdom,
But serve the others in their need. Each day
I stood unknown, save unto them, beside
The bloody strand and saw them die for Christ
Passing unto His glory crownèd saints!
One day when all the arena smoked with blood,
And many were the witnesses to Christ,
A glorious holocaust, I saw beside
The Praetor's throne, a man who watched the
scene
With eager eye. He paled and flushed and
trembled
When scourge bit bloodily or limb was wrenched
Upon the creaking rack or greedy fire
Devoured the tender flesh. But most of all
Upon his countenance sat wonder throned
To see the smiling fortitude of those
That thus so valiantly attested Christ;
For these, as feasters ever welcoming
The daintier bits to whet their appetites
For more, with constant joy embraced the pain
That ever brought them nearer unto Christ
In suffering.

AGLÄE

So have I heard they die
Whose god is Christ. But what of Boniface?
Why comes he not as thou hast come?

COLLECTED POEMS

CYPRIAN

Be not

Impatient, Daughter; thou shalt know; for so
He bade me speak as preface to his coming.
That day a maiden stood before the Praetor,
A tender child, a virgin in her bud,
Slender and frail, lustrous with innocence.
That she served Christ her only crime, but that
Enough. Her angered judge, that one so young
And simple yielded nothing to his frown
And braved the utmost vengeance of his threats,
Ordered her stripped before the vulgar throng,
That shame of its bold gaze might strike its
terror

Unto her virgin heart and bend her to his will.
Forthwith the rude, impetuous, ribald hands
Of jesting soldiers rent her garments from her,
And as they stripped her of her raiment, lo!
As 'twere by unseen hands unloosed
Her coiled abundant locks slid down about her
Pouring their sheltering lustre to her feet;
Nor any eye in all that gaping crowd
Raped e'en a glimpse of her fair innocence.

AGLÆ

Did not that melt the astonished Praetor's heart?

A G L A E

CYPRIAN

Nay, flint struck harder, flashes angrier.
Enraged at thwarting of his vile intent,
He ordered them to brand her slender breasts
With irons thrice heated in the bellowed flame,
But when the glowing metal white-hot touched
The whiter coolness of her virgin flesh
It paled to greyness, nor so much as seared
The tender skin. Whereat the Praetor wroth
To fiercer madness, and now a panting beast
With jaws outstretched, balked of his prey,
Shrieked out to place her on the dreadful wheel
And tear her limb from limb. And so they seized
And stretched her fragile frame, hand bound ad-

verse

To hand and foot to foot, her innocence
Still clothed in the bright wonder of her locks,
Upon the ponderous machine; but at
The lever's turn it cracked like brittle glass,
And she unbruised, unscathed, rose up and cried,
"Seek not my life save by the sword, for so
My Lord and Spouse, who is in Heaven, ordains."
And kneeling bent and bowed her slender neck;
Whereat a soldier lifted up his sword
And smote, and so she yielded up her soul
And passed a glorious witness to her Lord!

COLLECTED POEMS

AGLÆ

O tender child! O sweetest innocence!

CYPRIAN

At this the stranger by the Praetor's throne
Leaped forward, lifting up his hands to Heaven,
And cried, "O Christ accept me! I believe!
I am a Christian; Christ alone is God!"
Then scourge and fire they pitilessly plied
To shake his constancy that stood unshaken
Against the fearful torture, till the day
Sank wearied into night more merciful.
And that same night through one a Christian
guard,
Admitted to the prison secretly
I ministered the holy rites to him.
The second day therefrom, they brought him forth
Again before the Praetor, but he stood
Rooted in fortitude against the storms
Of their balked wrath. The fire that ate his flesh
He smiled at; pain he welcomed joyously;
The rack that seemed to wrench his limbs asunder
He eagerly embraced, though thrice he swooned,
When broken nature's powers ebbed out exhausted;
Yet smiled and welcomed that great agony
Again, as life flowed back to consciousness;

A G L A È

Till baffled by this Christian constancy,
The Praetor wearied out, commanded them
To slay him with the sword. Then with great joy,
That made a glory all about his face,
He bowed his head and yielded up his soul,
And passed, a glorious witness to his Lord.
The holy body of this saint I bring
From Tarsus — for so did Boniface request —
And this the Christian charm to heal thine ill.
(*To those outside.*)
Bring in the sacred burden. Its touch shall make
Thee whole again.

SONG

O sweet beyond all sweets to die
When summoned at His call,
Sweeter than life to die for him
Who died for all.

(*Christians enter bearing martyr's body; place bier down and retire to the rear.*)

CYPRIAN

Come, Daughter, lift the cloth that yet conceals
The holy face of one who died for Christ,
And gazing on this blessed countenance
Thou shalt be healed forever!

(*Aglaë approaches and places her hand upon the bier.*)

COLLECTED POEMS

AGLÆ

Some strange unknown virtue steals upon my
senses!

O Christian priest, beseech thy God for me!
I fear and yet rejoice! My soul is shaken!
I fear! I tremble!

CYPRIAN

Fear not, Daughter, but lift
The cloth with reverence.

AGLÆ

(*Lifting the cloth*) Boniface!

CYPRIAN

'Tis thus he greets thee Aglæ in the love of
Christ!

AGLÆ

(*Falling on her knees.*)
O Christ, accept me! I believe!

THE FEAST OF THALARCHUS

PERSONÆ

THALARCHUS, *citizen of Antioch.*

SIMEON, *the Styliste.*

THAIS, *an hetæra.*

XENARES, *slave of Thalarchus.*

ANTIPHON,

CRITIAS,

CHARMIDES,

GLAUCO,

HERMOGENES,

guests at the Feast.

Demons, Fauns, Dryads, Naiads, Silenus, Pan,
Bacchus and Bacchanals.

Place, Antioch. Time, first half of fifth century.

THE FEAST OF THALARCHUS

Enter THALARCHUS and XENARES.

THALARCHUS

Is all prepared, Xenares?

XENARES

Ay, my lord.

THALARCHUS

The guests all summoned?

XENARES

As thou didst bid, 'tis done.

THALARCHUS

And Thais, too?

XENARES

My lord, she waits thee now.

THALARCHUS

Now Antioch shall boast a feast to make
The gorgeous riot of Nero's groaning board
A peasant's fare in meanness. Ay, the gods
Themselves, if ancient legends speak the truth,

COLLECTED POEMS

Shall look with jealous eye from their high seats
Upon its splendid prodigality.
For I have summoned earth and sea and air
To yield me of their choicest; wines than gold
More precious, tanged with a hundred fiery suns
To make the blood run wanton in the veins;
The rarest fish that winnow in the deep
To edge with novel savour palates staled
With years of feasting; daintiest meats unknown
In this our Antioch before, to spur
The jaded appetites of ancient revellers;
Succulent dishes dressed by so rare art
That sated gluttons shall hunger at the sight;
Such subtle witcheries for eye and ear
That they shall swoon with giddy surfeit;
Beauty so prodigal of all her charms
That Venus would stale upon the general eye;
Music to ravish the amazéd sense
With sweeter melodies than Orpheus blew
In Pluto's ear to charm his wife from hell;
Ay, such a feast as eats a fortune up
At one swift mouthful, as death mortality!
'Tis 'gainst stale Fortune's self I throw the die
And scorn her, having basked within her smile
To dull satiety; and, scorning, court
The oft-reputed thunders of her frown
In sheer despite of her long blandishments.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Let go what will, let come what may, I fling
Defiance in her face! Let houses, lands
And slaves and ships, the substance of my all,
Be swallowed in this prodigality,
As thunderous earthquake and the roaring wave
Engulf a prideful city by the sea,
That leaves no stone to mark its ancient place.

XENARES

My lord, the hour approaches for the feast.
Wilt robe?

THALARCHUS

Yea, put on the festal garb,
The one I purchased from the Damascene,
The rarest tissue of the patient loom,
Spun from the purest wool in all the East,
White as the unearthed snow and delicate
As petals of the rose! How soft and light!
Meet for the limbs of the Olympian gods
When they recline at their ambrosial feasts!
How elegant in its simplicity!
Unblemished by the taint of broidery,
Yet richer by the pureness of its woof
Than were it gilded inches deep in gold
And seamed with all the pearls of gorgeous Ind.
Xenares, bring the Memphian jewel, too,—
"Twill fit with this most rich simplicity,—

COLLECTED POEMS

A single stone white with Promethean flame
Gathered within the bosom of the earth
When first 'twas stolen from heaven, and angry
Jove
Ravened the firmament with sulphurous bolts
Against the callous thief. Hear how I talk,
Xenares, babbling a fable of the gods,
The gruesome memory of an ancient lie
Spun in the nurseries of the world, when men
As yet were children. So my humour trips —
The gem! Hand it me. Zeus, how it burns!
White as the sun's white core, yet cold as death!
It was — the Jew I bought it of so said,
The lying trafficker — a sacred stone,
That once on mother Isis' holy breast
Burned 'neath the veil, when men yet worshipt
And bowed with bated breath before her shrine.
A pretty fable this of mother earth;
The gem within her bosom 'neath the veil
The easy symbol of the unquarried stone
Within the darkness of the uncaverned soil,
Ere men, awakened to the lust of things,
Had bared her treasures to the eyes of greed.
Fables, fables, to hide the shamefaced truth
And gloze the ugliness of our own deeds,
Lest we grow frightened at our naked selves!
How prone to invent and hold ourselves excused,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And out of all our baser part erect
Divinities! I've had my day of faith,
And hold but wraiths of wasted dreams. I've run
The gamut up and down and down again,
To find but jangling discords at the close.
Wealth has been mine, and its sure offshoot, power,
To make men pliant to my sovereign will
And servants of my every nod. A man,
I've sated every appetite; a god,
I've bent my little world to every whim;
Yet bankrupt of all joy I end at last,
Life staled and shattered like a rotted gourd.
Out on it all! I'll woo me beggary now,
And from her withered womb beget the babe,
Content, to suckle at her barren breasts
And fatten on their emptiness.
'Tis said that little want is slender care,
And lentils feast a witless appetite.

XENARES

My lord, the guests are all arrived and wait
Upon thy coming.

THALARCHUS

Well, I come. Place thou
The chaplet on my brow, that I go crowned,
The sovereign of a feast beyond all dreams.
Ye blushes of our common clay, how wonderful!

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Ye queenly flowers, the garden's royal flame,
That burn like us a single hour and fade
To lightest ashes blown by death about
The careless earth,— how sweet and beautiful!
Ah me, how pitiful the thing called life,
This tide of freshness quenched in salty death,
Whose famine ever grows the more it feeds,
As the waste sea upon the pleasant streams!
Since to that bitter end do all things flow,
Though ne'er so strong and beautiful. But come,
Let's to the feast, and in full cups deeper
Than memory drown this bleak philosophy.

(*Exeunt THALARCHUS and XENARES.*)
Hall of feast, guests reclining, music and song as
THALARCHUS enters.

To the feast, to the feast we come;
For life is now in its bloom;
Full flows the tide
As onward we glide,
Forgetful of doom.

Like petals that fall from their flowers,
Time scatters his rose-laden hours.
Ah, only too brief
Is the blush of the leaf
In morning's white bowers!

The F E A S T o f T H A L A R C H U S

Then gather the sweets of the day;
To-morrow they'll have faded away;
Seize the swift bloom,
Ere the blight of the tomb,
And live while we may.

Dread are the Fates to the fearful,
Heavy is grief to the tearful;
But sorrow and death
And the grave's fell breath
Are mocked by the cheerful.

Ripe is the grape on the vine,
Ruddy the blush of the wine;
The ivy-crowned god
Shall rule with his nod
The revels divine.

Let care at the portal await,
An exile outside of the gate:
Bacchus alone
Shall sit on the throne,
With Venus as mate.

What heed for time and its flowing,
What care for life and its going!

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Unreef the white sail
To catch the full gale
Of love's winds a-blowing!

The goblet upfill to the brim,
With joy aglow to the rim:
 To Venus our love
 With a snow-white dove,
 To Bacchus a hymn.

As gods on their thrones elate,
We reck not the threads of fate;
 Time is our slave,
 And death and the grave
 But shadows that wait.

Snatch then the moment that goes
Blown full with life's crimson rose;
 To-morrow's dim morn
 Will find but the thorn
 And thee — who knows?

CRITIAS

Methinks there is a discord in the song:
'Tis scarcely meet to dwell on death when life
Is at its full. And, when we feast, 'tis well
To think on nothing but the feasting.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

CHARMIDES

True,

Friend Critias. 'Tis an unsavoury sauce
Wherewith to season mirth; I like it not.
To be reminded death is at the door
Cripples an eager appetite.

ANTIPHON

Not so;

Ye be but poor philosophers. 'Tis this
That gives the zest to life, to know it ends.
The moiety of pleasure is pursuit,
The other half the climax of its taste
Subsiding in delicious ecstasy
Of pain. The sweet expectancy that fed
Your hope before this feast is half of it;
The other half in consummation now,
To end in swift satiety. But were
The Fates to fix your feasting here forever,
The wine that tingles at your lips were poison,
The viands that sweetly savour to the palate
Would grow polluted as a Harpies' feast,
And ye wane thinner than Tartarian shades
Consumed by the eternal misery
Of sheer monotony. No, friends, be wise;
Treasure the hour because it speeds; hold fast
The blossom because it fades; for therein lies

COLLECTED POEMS

The essence of our joy, whose little power
Grasps but the moment of vicissitude,
And in the last and greatest change,
That we call death, sums all of life, and makes
It bearable.

CRITIAS

By Bacchus, Antiphon,
Thou reasonest well; I'll drink the deeper for't.

CHARMIDES

No, no, he argues ill: better to feast
Forever here, recking nor change nor death,
Nor that vast emptiness where Hades yawns
For unsubstantial shades, than sour the wine
By thinking on the lees that lie at bottom.
Think you the rose is sweeter because it fades?
Nay, rather were its sweetness sweeter still
If it but bloomed in immortality;
Think you that beauty's beautiful because
It wrinkles into ugliness with age?
Is Thais' alabaster throat whiter
Than enskyed snow because the tawny years
Will yellow it? Her lips afame with love
Because the envious hours will pluck their blos-
soms
And leave them pale and withered? Nay, Anti-
phon,

The F E A S T o f T H A L A R C H U S

Beauty's her own essential loveliness,
And our delight because she is herself,
Nor borrows aught from time's revengeful waste.
Give me the ripened rose because it blooms,
The hour because 'tis filled with present sweets,
And Thais' lips redder than any rose,
Sweeter and dearer than Olympian bliss,
Because their luscious pastures are abloom
With living loves ripe now for gathering,
And all sufficient in themselves to make
This single hour eternal. Ay, I'd cram
All future into one capacious now,
And this full instant, blown radiant as the sun
With joy, fashion to immortality!

CRITIAS

Well said, Charmides: come, we'll drink to it!
Thy argument would set all Antioch dry!
Ay, were the circumambient seas all wine,
We'd drain them clean, and make old Neptune
 ride
On land. Come, Ganymede, fill up again!

ANTIPHON

Thou'rt over-young: thy tongue outruns thy wit.

CRITIAS

Thou'rt over-old: thy wit has lost its sap.

COLLECTED POEMS

ANTIPHON

And thine still in the green. Be wise and learn
Of age, which yoked with long experience
Has travelled life's close orbit o'er and o'er:
First, childhood's giddy cycle swings its course,
When all existence is the moment's toy,
And, stayed within its sinuous channel, time
Goes eddying round and round with bubbling
wave,
The hours perennial vessels of delight
Gushing with joy; then youth with passionate
feet
Pursuing pleasure to the close, draining
The chalice dry, and reaping aftermaths
Of pain in flagging nature's ravished powers;
Youth spent, mid-age awakening from the
dream,
Plucking experience from the thorny vine
Of sorrow, and temperately husbanding
Its joys by holding passion in the leash;
Lastly, old age, cautious as creeping snails
Feeling the way, on wisdom's slow staff leans,
With prudence for its guide, and treads the
path
Of pleasure moderately, knowing the pain
Of haste and ruin of excess.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

CHARMIDES

Thy blood

Is thin, and wrinkled as the cheek of eld
Is thy philosophy, O Antiphon.
Thou preachest for thyself, whose narrow stream
Is running dry in parched and barren sands!
Go spout thy platitudes at funerals,
And in the corpse's stony ear discourse
Upon the vanities of life. Our blood
Is red with lustihood, our years fuller
Than Amalthea's horn: we drink, we feast,
We die not!

CRITIAS

Come, sweet Ganymede, fill up
Again! I'm father Bacchus' own to-night,
Immortal as the gods! Fill up, I say,
And drown these musty arguments in wine.
Here's to thee, ancient Antiphon! Come, drink!
Warm thine old blood with bacchanalian fires;
Ruby the ashes of thy beard with wine,
And dream thou'rt young again. I'll wager now
Thou'st not been drunk these thirty years!

ANTIPHON

Fie, boy!

Thou'l feel the Furies' lash to-morrow morn.

COLLECTED POEMS

Thalarchus, I appeal to thee — holds not
My argument in reason?

THALARCHUS

Sweet friends,
Let's not dispute about the festal board,
But all here move to music and to joy
Concordant as the chiming heavens sing
In loves harmonious. Upon the arch
Of time enthroned we sit as gods to-night!
Let not to-morrow stare with stony face
Upon our festival. Olympians all,
We'll make the old Olympian fable true;
Pleasure and beauty by our side, whilst Love,
Divinest minister, with rosy fingers
Enweaves his flowery chains to hold us all
The bonded servants of his amorous nod.
Thais, O lovelier than Aphrodite's self
Rising resplendent from the shimmering waves
Kissing her feet and worshipping, sing thou
Of love, who art his sovereign mistress now.
Here, boy, the chaplet and the cithara.

ANTIPHON

How Bacchus blossoms wanton from his lips!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

CRITIAS

Sweet Hebe, sit thee with me while she sings,
Thy lip and mine upon the crater's rim,
While Venus and the god meet in the cup.
Hercle! thou art as lovely as Thais there,
Though Aphrodite envy her! Hebe
And Ganymede art thou in one, sweeter
Than Hybla's honey —

CHARMIDES

Cease, Thais begins.

THAIS (*singing*)

Swifter than fire
Is love's desire,
Sweeter than wine;
Stronger than hate,
Closer than fate
Its tendrils entwine.

Zeus' grim power
Stays not its soft hour,
Its sweet, sharp pain;
In Danaë's tower
Falls the hot shower
Of golden rain.

COLLECTED POEMS

Love is a rose
That flame-like blows
In passion's breast;
Pluck it and hold it,
Softly enfold it
In love's own nest.

Thy lips are red
As the poppy's head,
Thy breath as wine;
Tender thine eyes
As midnight skies
With stars that shine.

Take me and hold me,
Softly enfold me,
My lips to thine,
As love with desire,
Passion with fire,
And vine with vine.

THALARCHUS

Thais, thy beauty ravishes the eye,
Thy song the ear. Captive thou tak'st the heart,
And lead'st the soul in gilded chains to love!
Venus were beggared of the golden prize,
Were Paris here to-night.

The F E A S T o f T H A L A R C H U S

THAIS

And lov'st thou me,
Thalarchus?

THALARCHUS

Yea, as Bacchus wine, Mars war,
As Jove his power, and Venus lovers!

THAIS

Ah!

Thou lovest as I would be loved. Pledge me
As Antony his Cleopatra,
Staking imperial Rome; and I will plight
As Cleopatra pledged her Antony,
Throwing the priceless pearl within the cup,
Till its dissolved beauty made the wine
Precious as Egypt's kingdom. See! I fling
This pearl, though not so fair as Cleopatra's,—
Oh, would 'twere fairer by a kingdom's worth!—
Into the ruby flood, and pledge our loves
In its quintuple wealth; though this be poor
Indeed beside the largess of our hearts,
As beggars' mites compared to Croesus' gold.

ANTIPHON

The very pearl himself once gave her!

COLLECTED POEMS

THALARCHUS

Nay,

Fairest, touch but the wine with thy rose lips,
And it grows nectar fitter for gods than men,
Richer than all that Cleopatra ruled
Or Antony e'er flung away. I'll pledge,
Not in the fragile beauty of a pearl,—
Whose lustre, like the rainbow, melts away,
With heaven's cloudy tears, before the sun,—
But, worthier still, in the eternal fires
Of this most royal gem, that gleamed and glowed
Of yore on Mother Isis' fecund breast,
And now from thine drawing a rosier warmth,
Shall shed diviner radiance. Thais, to thee,
Empress of love, fair sovereign of our hearts!
Wear thou the stone, and in thy beauty 'twill
 shine
More beautiful. I'll sing to thee of love.

CHARMIDES

The stone's a treble fortune!

ANTIPHON

Treble that,
Charmides! Why, 'twould buy half Antioch!
How she did wheedle him! His juggled wits
Are like the pearl disported in the wine.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Occasion ripe, she played her venture well,
And staked a costly hazard on the die,
To win most preciously. When gain's the game,
Bacchus is never match for Venus.

THALARCHUS (*singing*)

What made the gods more fair than love?
What wrought the gods more rare than love?
 What compare to love?
 Tell me, ye who love!
Naught in the sea or air, O Love,
In earth or there above,
 O Love, my Love!

Sweeter than tang of wine, O Love,
Brighter than gems that shine, O Love,
 Than gold more fine, O Love,
 Softer than roses, Love;
The gods one gift divine, O Love,
My love with thine, my Dove,
 O Love, my Love!

THAIS

Sweeter than Orpheus fluted in mid-hell,
Thy song, Thalarchus. See, upon my breast,
The roseate gleam of mother Isis' stone.
Thou art a royal lover.

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

THALARCHUS

Who but a king
May fitly woo the queen of love?

CRITIAS

Hebe,
I'll drink with thee again; sweet Hebe —
Why, Venus were a hag beside thee now!
O Bacchus is a jolly fellow! Come,
We'll drink to him, a jolly tipsy god!
Let's sing to him, let's sing, I say!

ANTIPHON

Thou'l snore
With him under the table, Critias,
Before thou'l sing.

CRITIAS

Ay, snore with him; let's snore
With him; a jolly tipsy god, let's snore
With him, I say! Hebe, I drink to thee!
A jolly tipsy —

(CRITIAS *falls*)

ANTIPHON

Under the table, swine,
At last. The beast in man is most of him.
Behold, Charmides, thy philosophy,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Under the table. So folly clasps excess
About the neck, and both together drown.
In moderation taste the dangerous cup,
And therein find delight; for reason, master,
Holds back the foaming steeds of sense rushing
Headlong and blind along the parlous course,
Keener and truer for the checking hand
That guides them straining at the reins.

CHARMIDES

Old owl,

Hoot thy pragmatics to the frosty moon;
Bathe with cold Dian in her icy streams,
And nourish thy thin blood on chicory.
But we live in the lusty sun, our hearts
Aglow with all the blessing of the god;
'Tis mother Ceres stores them in the grape,
And father Bacchus brews them in the wine.
Here's rich Falernian ripe with Italy's tang,
Encasked these many years in the cool earth,
Mellow with her soft days, each draught a dream
Of golden happiness! Fill, fill again
And drink! Here's to Thalarchus and his love!
We're gods to-night and flout the troublous world!

GLAUCO

Hast tasted these delicious ortolans,
Hermogenes? and these flamingo tongues?

COLLECTED POEMS

I would I had a hundred palates now!
Alas, why were we made with only one!

HERMOGENES

Thou'rt crammed as full as a cock's craw, Glauco!

GLAUCO

Oh that I had a craw to stow away
These ortolans! The gods, Hermogenes,
Were jealous when they made us, else why made
Our small capacities all single?

HERMOGENES

True,
Yet thou canst eat again.

GLAUCO

But when again
Wilt find such feast as this! such ortolans,
Such mullets, all the way from Mauritania!
Such lampreys, luscious with ambrosial sauce,
As though the gods themselves were in the
kitchen!
Such tender mushrooms, sweeter than —

HERMOGENES

Such wines!
Thou hast forgot the wines!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

GLAUCO

No, no! drink not
Hermogenes, before or when thou eat'st.
'Tis the first canon of the feaster's art;
For wine thickens the nicer taste and dulls
The quintessential appetite, that sense,
That cultured sense, whose fine discernment sifts
The subtler flavours of the food, but has
No lodgment in the gross and vulgar mouth.
Then after thou has eat repletedly,
Drink to the full, and in the vintage drown
Thy woe, that thou canst eat no more.

HERMOGENES

Herclie!

See, Glauco, Thais' beauty glows revealed!
Venus Epistrophia, thou art outdone!

GLAUCO

It is an art, Hermogenes, that few
Attain. In eating, men are mostly beasts.
That nice distinction which —

(Enter *Bacchanalians.*)

HERMOGENES

O ravishment!

Behold Silenus and his glittering crew!
Evoe! Fauns and Nymphs, Dryads and Naiads,

COLLECTED POEMS

With lute and Father Pan's own mellow reed,
With clash of cymbal and with beat of drum,
With ivy wreath and verdant myrtle bough,
With tossing arm and heaving breast! *Evoe!*

GLAUCO

Here, boy! That dish of lampreys I'll essay
Again. And put that mullet by my side.
Those locusts, too, place there. As I was saying,
That nice discernment art alone attains
Is won by long —

HERMOGENES

Io! Bacche! Evoe!
It is the ivy-crownéd god himself,
With all his Bacchanals! O wondrous sight!
Thou glittering pageant, feasting the eager eye!
Thou golden dream of fantasy, I leap
For joy! *Evoe! Bacche! Io! Io!*

GLAUCO

How tinsel catches a light soul! Hi, boy!
Bring me those ortolans Hermogenes
Insultingly forgets.

HERMOGENES

How they disport
Themselves! O glorious rout! They sing, they
dance,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

They shout and leap with mirth and passion!
See!

The Naiads to the fountains run! The Fauns
Pursue and seize the yielding nymphs! EVOE!

(*First Chorus of Bacchanals*)

Io! Evan!
Clash the cymbal!
Crash the timbrel!
Lash the drum!
We come! We come!
Io! Evan!

Let the pipe shrill
Through valley and hill!
Io! Evan!

Silens and Pan,
In the wild van,
With riot and song,
Ten thousand strong!
Io! Evan!

Bacchus, inspire!
We breathe with thy fire!
Io! Evan!

COLLECTED POEMS

He who would stay us
Remember Pentheus!
Io! Evan!

Clash the cymbal!
Crash the timbrel!
Lash the drum!
We come! We come!
Io! Evan!

(*Second Chorus of Bacchanals*)

Io! Bacche! Io!
Twi-mothered god,
With ivy-wreathed rod!
Io! Bacche! Io!

Lord of the vine,
Life of the wine,
We are thine, we are thine!
We run and we dance,
We leap and we prance,
The green turf on;
White-footed Naiad,
Light-footed Dryad,
Goat-footed Faun!
We turn and we twirl,
As leaves when they whirl,
As swift waters swirl

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

In the eddy's embrace;
We twist and we spin,
Wind out and wind in
 In the maze of the race;
We crouch and we spring,
Our arms toss and fling;
We shout and we sing
To Bacchus, our king!
 With lips wide apart,
 With swift beating heart,
Wildly we chant,
Heavy we pant,
The breath coming scant,
As we leap and we prance,
Rush back and advance,
As we dance, as we dance, as we dance
To Bacchus, our king!

THAIS

Thalarchus, thou art pale!

CHARMIDES

Critias, awake!

The great god Bacchus comes!

ANTIPHON

Nor fire nor death
Could rouse him now: his wits are drowned and
sodden.

COLLECTED POEMS

A DRYAD (*to Antiphon*)

I pluck thy beard, Tithonus.

CHARMIDES

Pluck it, fair nymph;
Thou'l never melt his snows; he's iced around
With cold discretion twenty inches thick.

DRYAD

I'll be Aurora to his ancientness;
I'll sit upon his knee and thaw him out.

ANTIPHON

Nay, wanton, scorch Charmides with thy flame;
I'm old and seasoned now these sixty years
I bear the buckler of experience
Against thy shafts.

THAIS

Thalarchus, art thou ill?
Thy hand is trembling, and thou spill'st the wine.

ANTIPHON (*to Dryad*)

Away, girl! The years have made me wise.

CHARMIDES

And sourer than an unripe grape.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

DRYAD

No, no!

How soft the silken silver of thy beard!
Thy beard is older than thy face. Bacche!
But thou'rt not old! Thou slanderest thyself;
Thy skin's as soft as youth's, thine eye as clear.

ANTIPHON

Thou flatt'rst me!

DRYAD

I do but see thee close;
Take off thy beard, and thou'rt as young as any.

ANTIPHON

Now, now! dost thou say truly!

THAIS

Speak Thalarchus!

Like chiselled marble thou dost stand and stare!

THALARCHUS

Where art thou, Thais? Charmides! Antiphon!
Where are the lights that made our banquet blaze?
How dim, how chill, like breath from sepulchres,
This fetid air!

THAIS

I hold thee by the hand —

What spell is on him?

COLLECTED POEMS

ANTIPHON

'Tis the wine that mounts
His brain, and weaves the foolish phantasy.

THALARCHUS

A mirk mist rises floating up as o'er
A fen, and slowly moves and curls heavy
And dun, yet ghastly with a bluish light
As from a dying moon — and in it, see!
A shadow like a giant's!

THAIS

I see naught,
Save feast and feasters, a round of mirth and joy,
A full blown rose of pleasure. Come, shake off
This most unnatural and deadly humour,
This cankerous blight, this sick unwholesome dread
That nips thy valour and thy wonted charm,
And be thy gracious self again!

THALARCHUS

Hear'st not
The rumble of vast voices gathering far,
Like distant thunder in the womb of wrath!

THAIS

Naught but the songs of revel and of love,
The joyous halloo of Bacchus and his crew,

The F E A S T o f THALARCHUS

The cithern's silver cadence and the lute's,
Free laughter and wild dalliance-echoing mirth.

THALARCHUS

Out of the muggy mist issues a stench,
As from a thousand rotting carcasses.
God! How it sickens the revolted sense!

THAIS

Nay! 'Tis but the odor of the rose
That makes the air most redolently sweet;
And yonder font of Araby's perfumes,
Plashing and sparkling in its jewelled bay,
Casting their precious scents upon the breeze.

THALARCHUS

The shadow deepens! See! The cloud now
swirls
And parts; and, topping o'er the misty rheum,
A lofty pillar rears its stony crest.
And on it, lo! the figure of a man,
In suppliant attitude, all bent and bowed,
As one crushed utterly! About him swarm
And crowd a thousand hideous shapes, gibing
And threatening! Horrible! Oh, horrible!

DEMONS

Stinking hypocrite! Bah!
Think'st thou to atone for others?

COLLECTED POEMS

Thy frailty bear their sins!
Bald fool on the pillar's top!
Thou leprous scab of folly!
Ha! ha! Hell shouts with laughter!

SIMEON

My God, my God! Help thou me in the trial!
I faint with weakness!

DEMONS

He faints, the cowardly wretch!
A little pain, and he falls down,
O'ercome. Seize him, and rack him
From head to foot. Crush him flat
With hell's full vengeance. Shoot lightnings
Through his spine, and in his eyeballs
Spit keen fire to his brain.
He'd make amends for other's sins,
Would he? and bear the penalty,—
This lump of foulness, this filthy clay,
This idiot on the pillar's top,
Unshorn, unkempt, unwashed,
Imputing sanctity to dirt!
Drivelling fanatic! Hoary fool!

SIMEON

Upon thy merits, Lord, alone I lean:
I have no strength but thine. Thou didst endure,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Within the garden's keep, the agony
Of sin's embrace, and felt its fetid breath
Upon the mirror of thy purity;
And all the reeking tide of evil poured
Its slimy floods upon thee, stifling thee,
Till nature, pushed beyond her durance, swooned
And sweated blood through all thine aching
veins!

Pour from the precious treasury of thy pain
Some little grace to stay my impotence!
Fill up my emptiness with thy vast merit;
For I but merit in thy merit, Lord,
And gain but in thy gain.

DEMONS

Craven! poltroon! He's afraid;
He dares not fight alone,
And calls for aid upon another.
We call upon no over-lord:
Our strength's our own, all undivided!
In independent might self-lords,
We bend no cringing back,
And lift no suppliant voice
Whining to the tyrant!
Upon him, Spirits of the Deep!
Rend him! flay him with your teeth
From head to heel, till the red flesh

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Quiver and palpitate! This
For the lusts of Antioch!

SIMEON

They scourged thee at thy pillar, Lord, till Thou
Didst stand in thine own blood. The knotted lash
That flaked thy flesh away — O piteous sight! —
Was the red tooth of foul concupiscence;
And Thou didst stand in patience and endure,
Silent, the ravenous fang that bit and tore
Thine innocence in offering for our sins!
And from a thousand wounds thy mangled flesh
Wept bloody streams upon the guilty earth!
By thy fierce scourging, Lord, grant me new
strength,
And from the vessels of thy grace fill up
My nothingness with power!

DEMONS

Again he seeks defence
Behind another's might.
The skulker! White-livered dotard!
Dastard, we spit on thee!
Hast thou not set thyself up
On this high pillar's top,
A shining mark of sanctity
For all the country round,
A protest and rebuke

The F E A S T o f THALARCHUS

To lustful Antioch!
And for its sins acceptest
The rigorous penalties;
Endurest wind and rain
And storm and cold and heat
For its soft luxuries;
Sufferest the filth and dirt
Of thy scab-crusted body,
Fouling these long and tedious years,
For its nice daintiness,
Its sensual cleanliness;
Bearrest hunger and thirst
For its vile gluttonies,
Silence and solitude
For its wild blasphemies
And lascivious hours;
The narrow prison of the pillar
For its licentiousness!
And thou'rt a saint, forsooth,
And workest miracles,
And hearest the people call thee saint,
And pray to thee for help
At thy tall pillar's base!
A sorry saint, indeed,
Who darest not own thy shadow,
Nor comest forth to meet a foe
Out of thine own valiance,

COLLECTED POEMS

But, supplicating, whinest
A mongrel prayer to Heaven,
Timid and trembling! Bah!
Psalm-droner! Prayer-monger!
Thou a saint! Ha! ha!

SIMEON

O Lord, upon thy handiwork look down
With love's forbearing eye; for I am naught
Within the searching splendour of thy sight,
Whose vision equals to thyself alone,
One Lord omnipotent and infinite,
Maker of heaven and earth through thy sole
Word!
Within my mother's womb thou madest me,
And out of the abyss of nothingness
Didst give me being through very love! — O
Lord,
My God, let me not fail to love again! —
And nourished me and cherished me, a babe,
Who knew thee not, in helpless infancy,
And guided me through all the wayward years
Of youth, and led me wandering in the paths
Of sin back to the bosom of thy mercy!
Let me not fail, my God, nor deem myself
Before thee aught but thy poor creature, dust
And ashes in thy hand!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

DEMONS

Grovellor! Abject worm,
In vile abasement crawling!
Cracked vessel of dishonour!
Upon him, Spirits! Befoul him
With utmost stench and filth!
Traitor to his manhood!
Betrayeur of his sovereign will!
Thou mimic of a saint!
Thou manikin! Despiser
Of the sacred precious gift
Of freedom, kept by us alone
Intact against the tyrant!

SIMEON

O Lord, Thou dost solicit me with love,
And gently knockest at my heart, calling
Upon me sweetly! And I may close the door
Against Thee, Lord, and answer not; for Thou,
O Lord, respectest in thy handiwork
The gift of freedom, which Thou didst bestow
Upon Thy creature, who but holds as he
Receives from Thee. And when, O Lord, I bid
Thee come, moved by thy blandishment, Thou
com'st
In the swift whirlwind of thy love, and snatch'st

COLLECTED POEMS

Me up in ecstasy, and hold'st me ravished
With love! For I am thine, O Lord, by right
Of sovereignty; and Thou art mine by might
Of love! Thou gavest me myself, O Lord,
And hold'st me in the hollow of Thy hand,
Suspended o'er the void of nothingness;
And then Thou gavest me thyself, O Lord,
Pouring thy goodness upon me like a flood
Of pleasant waters on a barren plain!
And Thou hast bought me with a price, O Lord
And, in the covenant of Christ made flesh,
Hast pledged thyself to me, and feedest me
Upon thyself, till I abide in Thee,
And Thou in me; whereof in Thee I find
The fulness of all love, the round and sum
Of all desire! for in Thee, Lord, I am
And have my life, and move, O Lord, in Thee,
Who art our perfect good and perfect love,
First impulse and last term of liberty.
For I, O Lord, am as a little child,
And Thou the eager mother of the child,
Who first instils in him desire to walk,
And leads him by the hand that he may walk,
Then kisses him, rewarding him, because
He walked, who neither had desire to walk,
Save through the inspiration of her love,
Nor yet had walked save by her guiding hand,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And still withal of his own motion walked;
For thine the grace, O Lord, that moves, and thine
The grace that aids, and thine the guerdoning
grace,
That crowns thy creature's free response, who
moves
To Thee by love divine solicited,
And rests in Thee by love divine rewarded.

DEMONS

Caviller! Word-monger!
Hoary sophist fouling
Man's limpid intelligence with murky phrases;
Clouding the crystal brightness
Of independent reason
With muddy mysteries!
We'll teach thee proper pride
For the high dignity
Of outraged intellect
Betrayed and surrendered
By thee in shameless fear,
To be tramped mockingly
Under the Tyrant's feet!
Lift him in mid-air
By the heels and dash him down
Upon the rocks beneath,

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Smashing his foolish skull,
Scattering the muddled brains,
That shame the high prerogative
And abase the lofty puissance
Of man's lordly mind —
Rush upon him! Sweep him off!

THALARCHUS

My God, my God, let not the malignant host
Prevail!

THAIS

Of whom, Thalarchus, speakest thou?

ANTIPHON

There is some maggot in his o'erwrought brain,
That feeds upon his reason; let be, let be,
He'll mend by morning.

THALARCHUS

Like a surcharged cloud,
Green with the sulphurous wrath of pent light-
nings,
They gather round him, ominous, muttering!
And now with sudden fury unleash upon him!
O God! — See, they touch him not! but break
Against the pillar's edge as the giant sea
Flinging against a beetling cliff is stayed

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Roaring, and beaten back draws to the deep
Again, foaming in angry impotence!

SIMEON

Thy brows were crowned with thorns, my God,
piercing

Thy temples with their spikes, and all around
Thy head circled the barren coronal

Pressed by the ribald soldiers' cruel staves
Into the bruised flesh. This mock, O Lord,

Thou didst endure in silent humbleness,
And wore this leafless diadem of pride

For sins of those, who insolently boast
The shallow plummet of their little minds

Sounding the muddy waters of time's sea,
Above the immeasurable, sacrosanct

Eternal Reason of their God filling
The crystal oceans of the infinite.

Hear me, O Lord, and let thy strength be
mine!

Lift thou me up to thy humility,
Who only knows to conquer through thy pain!
And in the bloody wine spilled from the vine,
Whose bitter thorns envised thy tender brows,
Sustain my weakness, and thy pardon pour
Upon the pride of boastful Antioch!

COLLECTED POEMS

THALARCHUS

His prayer prevails! Their horrid ranks repulsed,
Staggered and broken, scatter like thinning rack
Before the first keen breath of crystal winds
Clearing the labouring heavens.

DEMONS (*retiring*)

Not through thy might, Simeon,
Is our due vengeance stayed:
Another's power holds us,
Tyrannously thrusts us back.
Our valour undismayed
Yields only for the moment.
We'll come again new armed,
And crush thee flat against
The earth, and stamp thee down
Into the mire, like dung!

SIMEON

Now praise to Thee, O Lord, my God, all praise!
For thine the power and thine the glory, Lord,
Who sittest on the Cherubim, the earth
Thy lowly footstool and the heavens thy throne!
Before thy servant Thou didst hold thy shield
Against the demons' power, and Hell prevailed
not!
For who shall stand against thy might, O Lord?

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Before thy wrath the heavens are shrivelled,
The earth is smoke, and all the goods thereof;
The sun goes out in darkness, and the stars
Flicker and die; time like a spent breath
Evanishes, and space through all its utmost
bounds
Shrinks shuddering! Nor earth, nor heaven, nor
hell
May stand before thee, Lord, eterne and sole,
Coequal with thyself alone in being,
In power, in love and goodness infinite,
Perfect and absolute and all-sufficient
Within thyself who art eternal good!
But thou, O Lord, wilt not destroy thy works:
Thou lov'st the goodly order of thy hand,
And out of the disorder of our sins
Hast drawn still sweeter harmonies of love
Through him thine only Son, consubstant God
With Thee, who stooping to our lowliness
Lifted our nature to thy holiness,
And spanned the chasm in nature and in grace,
Which sin had breached through all our universe;
And, bearing all the burden of our fault,
Made gracious healing in vicarious pain,
Consummate in the awful sacrifice
Upon Golgotha's trembling mount, when all
The elements made moan, and stricken Nature,

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Sighing through all her ways, in darkness veiled
Her conscious eyes! Through Him, O Lord, the
power,
By Him the victory, and unto Him
The glory! I but a shaken reed fearful
Before the blast, broken, save for thy hand
Sheltering thy creature's weakness in the storm.

THALARCHUS

Oh, how sublime his words, how great the power
Thereof, scattering the hellish crew like dust
In the whirlwind, beating their malice down
As the keen hail levels the boastful pride
Of summer fields! O mystery of pain
And death, that issuest in power and life,
Grant me to see! Upon my purblind heart
Pour down thy deep irradiance, and pierce
The fetid exhalations of my sins,
That blind the soul's uncleansed and rheumy eye!
Inflame me with desire, and purge me clean
In penitential fires, till I, too, learn
To love as Simeon, a holocaust in Christ
For wanton Antioch's iniquities!
Simeon, upon thy pillar's top pray thou
For me, who mocked thee and thy God, and knew
Thee not, nor him, and knowing not, reviled
And called thee fool, fanatic, dotard, dolt,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And heaped upon thee all the ribaldry
Of the contemptuous world, the scorn of pride,
The scoff, the jest, the easy ridicule
Of sensual hearts, whose unpurged lust feeling
The secret sting of others' holiness,
As the sharp thorn beneath the rose, resents
The silent imputation of its guilt,
And brooking not the impeachment of its shame,
With pitchy tongue envenomed in foul hates,
Spits out the bawdy mockeries of its filth
Upon the lilies of love's sanctities.
O Simeon, pray for me, whose sins thou takest
In suffering upon the pillar's height,
Under the pitiless sun, the icy stars,
In pangs of nature and assaults of hell;
Pray thou for me, who from the depths below
Cries out in agonies of shame and calls
In Christ's dear name for mercy and for pardon!

SIMEON

I hear a voice as of one calling out
And beating at the gates of mercy! Lord,
Hear him and open unto him!

THAIS

Who is't

His madness now addresses?

COLLECTED POEMS

ANTIPHON

One, Simeon,
They call the Stylite, an idiot monk, who lives
Upon a pillar's top near Antioch,
Some twenty miles beyond the city's gates.

THAIS

I've heard the rumour of this strange disease.

SIMEON

Lord, by thy bloody sweat, have mercy, Lord!

ANTIPHON

Under the subtle witchery of the wine
This monkish madness has seized upon his wits,
And holds his fancy: it will pass anon.

SIMEON

By thy red scourging at the pillar, Lord,
Have mercy! Let his cry come unto Thee!

CHARMIDES

Heed not Thalarchus, Thais: to-morrow's morn
Will see his health restored.— Come, I pledge
Thy beauty in this draught!

THAIS

I'll drink with thee!
Let Bacchus blow the fire and Venus lead!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

SIMEON

Hearken unto Thy creature's cry, O Lord!
Gird not the bowels of mercy up, but hear!
For Thou has said, Whoso shall knock, to him
Shall it be opened. By the clotted thorns
About thy brow, the raillyery and the mock
Of Pilate's soldiers spitting on Thee, Lord,
Incline unto thy creature's lowness,
Who cries to thee from out the depths, and calls
Unto the ear of thy compassion, Lord;
For Thou didst take our frailty on thyself
In pity of our sins.

THALARCHUS

Blessed be thou,
O Simeon, thrice blessed thou who pray'st
For me sunk in the foulness of my sins!

SIMEON

Thou wilt not, Lord, refuse a contrite heart;
And Thou didst pardon Mary Magdalene,
Who wept her sorrow on thy sacred feet,
And him who cried to Thee beside thy cross;
And Thou didst heal the lepers of their sores,
Till they were fair to look upon; and him
That lay asick of bed, thou didst unloose
Of all his sins and bid him rise and walk;

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

For thou didst come with healing in thy hands
And mercy unto life again for them
That would arise from out their sinfulness
To walk with thee.

DEMONS (*in distance*)

He's winning Thalarchus from us!
Let him not prevail! Curse him!
Were't not for the Despot's power,
Who tyrannously holds us back,
We'd snatch and lift his column
In mid-air, and dash it to earth
And smash it, and him with it,
Who now, on his filthy eerie
Of vantage, drones his prayers
To listening Heaven against
Our valour and our might!
We ask but a fair field
To smite him down and crush him!
This vagabond of sanctity!
Let him go back to his cell
And mumble his unctuous prayers
In secret to his fattened God.
Hate seize us and rack us
At mention of that name!
Let him not stand conspicuous
Upon the pillar's top before

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

The people, to seduce them
From their soft living
And mellowed luxuries
By his austere ensample
Of dire mortification
And penance vicarious!
'Tis against the cloister's rule:
Why do they tolerate it?
But we'll o'ercome him yet:
Hell's not easily foiled!
We have an arrow left
In our quiver to pierce him.
Ha! ha! we know a way
To snare this filthy bird,
And drag him from his nest.
Ha! ha! we'll show him yet
The craft of independent
Intellect he so derides
And flouts in abject obeisance
To the Tyrant he worships! Ha! ha!
We know a way to lime him!
We'll double on the ancient fox
Before he runs to earth again!

SIMEON

Let him not perish, Lord, who calls on Thee!
As Thou didst suffer Simon to take Thy cross

COLLECTED POEMS

Upon the heavy way to Calvary,
Though asking not, yet after bearing gladly,—
Suffer Thy creature now who pleads with thee,
To share its burden humbly, Lord, with thee,
And out of the vast fulness of thy love
Draw balm and healing for his sinful hurts.
On me, O Lord, the creature of thy hand,
Who am as nothing in thy sight, the least
Of those who serve Thee, of infirmities
Full as a sieve of meshes holding nought,—
On me, O Lord, the fellow of his hour,
His country, and his city, pour the pain
Of his offending, till thy justice shifts
Her beam and balances her scale again
In full amend of penance done. And this,
O Lord, prostrate before thee in the dust
Of mine unworthiness, mote in the breath
Of thine infinitude, I humbly pray
Out of the preciousness of Christ's spent blood,
Which purchased us with ransom infinite,
Eternal price of Adam's and our sin!

DEMONS (*approaching*)

Woe! woe! we're overcome,
Routed by Simeon's prayer!
Great is his holiness,
That conquereth our might,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Lords of the deep with power
O'er hell's dominion wide;
Spirits of darkness knowing
The potent secrets of nature,
Seducing the lordly race
Of men to open rebellion
Against their Maker. Woe! woe!
Our pride is fallen, our boast
Is broken, crushed down flat
By Simeon's might in prayer.
Woe to us, woe! Keener
Than pangs of hell the shame
Of defeat by Simeon brought
Upon our puissant ranks
Broken against the rampart
Of his potent prayer,
As the dusty simoon breaks
Against the bulwarked mountain!
Woe! woe! O shameful woe!
Hate unto him forever!

SIMEON

Bear down upon me, Lord, bear down and plunge
Me in the abyss of emptiness, whence I
Was drawn by Thee, the creature of thy love!
The clamour of hell is but a noisy wind
Before Thee, vain as froth upon the wave.

COLLECTED POEMS

The arrow of their hate they aim at Thee,
I but the seeming mark. For Thine, O Lord,
The power that scatters them; and they, O Lord,
As I, are but the creatures of thy breath,
Hardened against Thee in their pride, envious
Of man whom thou hast made to fill their place.
And I am but an empty vessel filled
With the omnipotence of prayer, which Thou
In largess of thy love hast poured in me;
And sufferest me to use against their power,
Whose damning praise is but the silken snare
Of flattery, with which bold Satan once
Essayed to take the soul of Christ himself!
And Christ's the glory sole against the power
Of hell broken by him forever!

DEMONS (*on right side, disguised now as Angels of Light*)

Hail, Simeon, victor o'er the hellish host!
By Heaven sent, we come to solace thee
With happy tidings and assurance glad
Of Heaven's high approval. Thou hast fought
The goodly fight and won. Hail to thee, saint!

SIMEON

Now praise to Jesus Christ alone! To Him
The glory, whose right hand of power reaches
To midmost hell!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

DEMONS (*on left side, undisguised*)

Why speaks he the Terrible Name,
That makes all hell shudder
Unto its deepest deeps!
Curse it! curse it! curse it!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Rest thee, Simeon; for thou hast earned thy meed.
Behold the raging elements repressed,
Which hell with malice vain against thee roused.
And all the air that lately shook with storm
And roared, rent with the crackling thunderbolt,
Slumbers in mellow quiet and breathes soft balm.
Down from the glowing arches of the night,
Peace, dovelike on her rediscovered nest,
In feathery silence droops, and dreaming broods;
Tender as mothers' eyes upon their babes,
And pure, the glimmering ardour of the stars
Falls on the shadowed earth and wearied men
Sunk in the bath of slumber after toil,
To wake upon the coming morn refreshed
Against the burden of the hastening day.
All nature sleeps and rests, drawing new life
From the deep fountains of repose; for so
The wisdom of the Maker foreordained,
Dividing night from day. Rest thee, and sleep,
O holy Simeon, while we watch and guard.

COLLECTED POEMS

SIMEON

The rounded beauty of the night, thy hand,
O Lord, in the beginning builded up,
And fixed the pillars of the firmament,
And gave their motions to the wheeling stars,
Making thy glory manifest on high:
Thy word uttered above the void brought forth
The solid earth and all that live thereon,
The circling seas and all that swim therein,
The liquid air and all that fly therein,
Each in its place and moving in its sphere
With variant note blending concordant song,
And making in the conchéd ear of Heaven
Vast harmony. And so the whole round world
And the respondent heavens, O Lord, utter
Thy glory and make manifest thy praise!
For thine the gentle silence of the night,
And thine the softness of the balmy air,
And thine the sweet refreshment of repose
And strength renewed in man and beast and
fowl;
And thine the glory of the golden morn,
And all the splendour of the rising sun
Shedding the benediction of its light
Upon the waking world.

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Nay, holy man,
Rest thee; and whilst thou slumberest, drawing
New vigour from the crystal founts of sleep,
We'll raise on high the hymn of praise.

THALARCHUS

Simeon,

Pray thou for me, and at the feet of Christ
Make intercession for my grievous sins!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Thou'rt wearied, Simeon, and thy force is spent.
The very desert sleeps, and darkness shrouds
The land heavy with silence, wooing all
To rest. Deep is the shadow of the night,
And nature yields responsive to the law
Ordained in the beginning. Spent art thou
With battling 'gainst the routed hosts of hell,
And all thy racked and bruised frame leaden
With weight of toil drags down thy spirit worn
With unremitting prayer against thy foe.
Respite thy vigilance and prayerful might;
And to great nature's hest surrendering,
In due obedience to its Maker's law,
In slumber steep thy flagging powers, and rest.

COLLECTED POEMS

THALARCHUS

Simeon, Simeon, pray thou for me whose heart
Is withered with his sins!

ANTIPHON

The night hath past
The middle heavens two hours and more: 'tis late.
I go. Farewell, good friends.

CHARMIDES

Love knows no hour:
I stay with thee, Thais, be it night or day.

THAIS

Now is the ripened hour of revel. Stay,
O Antiphon, and drink with me! I touch
Thy goblet with my lips. Wilt not refuse
My pledge!

ANTIPHON

I yield the golden moment, Thais,
And staying court the precious, sweet delay.

THALARCHUS

Simeon, Simeon, pray thou for me whose soul
Lies in the darkness of its evil days!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

SIMEON

Let him not perish, Lord, whose voice I hear
Out of the night in supplication raised!
Renew his heart, and thy refreshment pour
Upon his bruised spirit crying out!
If Thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities,
Lord, who shall stand? Spare us, and gather not
Our sins against the day of wrath, but hear,
O Lord, and let our prayer come unto thee!
Thy mercy, Lord is even above thy works;
And thou hast made thy mercy manifest
In Christ, who stood for our iniquities,
And took our sins away! Have mercy, Lord,
And by Christ's blood hearken unto our cry!

DEMONS (*on left side*)

Confusion upon him! Tempt him!
Let him not escape! Tempt him!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Heaven commend thy vigilance, O saint,
And we but tried thee for the Lord. The voice
Thou hearest crying is the voice of one
Who prays in Antioch, by Heaven's power
Permitted through the thick and heavy night
To see thee on the pillar's top, and, touched

COLLECTED POEMS

By grace at sight of thee, cries out for pardon.
The ways of Heaven are merciful, nor time
Nor place resists the beating floods of grace
Poured from the copious fountains of its love:
E'en in the midst of riot and of sin
The impetuous tide of mercy snatches him,
And bears him to the deeps of love beyond.
And Heaven, to solace thee in recompense
Of all thou hast endured and overcome,
Puts back the murky curtain of the dark,
And suffers thee to look upon the scene:
Behold Thalarchus and the wanton feast,
Where thou hast conquered and beat back the
lords
Of hell! Look, Simeon, and rejoice!

THALARCHUS

Pray, pray,
O Simeon; for my heart is dust, my soul
Ashes, and all my years but bitterness!

SIMEON

The Lord will water thee and make thee sprout;
For He is Lord of love. Mighty His power,
That overcometh death and puts down sin
Under his feet! How wonderful thy ways,
O Lord, and no man knoweth them; for who
Hath been thy counsellor? For of thee, Lord,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

And by thee are all things, and in thee all,
Who are from the beginning sole, and are
Eternal term unto thyself alone!
Praise ye the Lord, ye heavenly creatures, praise!
Ye Cherubim and Seraphim and Powers
And all Angelic Hierarchies ranged
In flaming choirs, and all ye blessed hosts
And saints that bask within his beam eterne,
Ye spotless lilies of Christ's fruitful love,—
Praise ye the Lord through all your ringing ranks!
And thou, whose virgin flesh didst bear His Son,
Alone of Adam's race untouched of sin,
Co-worker in Redemption's plan by grace
Of Him who had regard for thy humility,
And lifted thee above all creatures else
In Heaven's celestial ranks or on the earth
Unto that dignity of motherhood
So sacrosanct that none save Him alone
May comprehend the height and depth and term
Of its exalted holiness,— praise ye
The Lord! Rejoice and be glad with me
Who, falling down before His Face, lift up
My voice and cry out in exceeding joy,
Seeing this marvel of the Lord's right hand!
For wonderful the starry heavens above,
The unseen fountains of the crystal sea,
The far foundations of the fixed earth,

COLLECTED POEMS

The little things and great of all that is,
The tiny creature floating in the light,
The spaces of the yawning universe,
And time's wide tract from utmost shore to shore
Of his eternity so wonderful
And beautiful in number, weight, and measure,
Balanced within his all-sustaining hand,
And moving in the order of his power
To that ordainéd and harmonious end
Set in His wisdom for their perfect close,—
Praise ye the Lord for these His mighty works,
But praise ye more beyond all praise of words,
Beyond all utterance of human tongue,
Beyond the vastest reach of angel's thought,
That mystery of grace and farthest love,
Touching the sinner's hard averted will,
Subduing pride and melting all the soul
To tears, till it incline to him again;
And spurning all its hated servitude,
Inviolate of all constraint, rises
Enfranchised from its reeking bed of sin
And freely answers to the call of Love!
O wondrous miracle, O mystery
Of Love beyond all knowing! Praise ye
The Lord, ye hills and mountains, valleys and
plains,
O earth and heaven, and ye shining stars,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Ye blessed hosts of happiness, ye Powers,
Ye Dominations, Angels and Archangels,
Till all the universe of high and low
Trembling, responsive with the harmony
In circling joy about the throne of Love,
Sing in the swelling chorus of its praise,
Hosanna to the Lord! Hosanna! Hosanna!

THALARCHUS

O waters of great joy upon my soul,
Refreshing all my faintness! On the wings
Of morning am I lifted up! O balm
Of healing to my wounded spirit! Simeon,
Thy words are holy courage in my heart!

DEMONS (*on left side*)

Confusion on him! Tempt him!
He prays like a mighty fountain
Leaping to Heaven — tempt him!
Ye sluggish spirits, shame
On your vaunted cunning, boasters!
Shall it be said in hell
That this broken and wasted fool
Worsted the high intelligence
Of pure spirits heaven-born,
Though cast out by the Tyrant
By sheer force — shame us not!

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

Make no delay! Tempt him!
And in this subtle net
Drag him from his high perch!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Thy prayers have wrenched Thalarchus from the
grip

Of hell e'en midst the orgies of the feast!
Upon thy victory feed thine eager soul;
For Heaven vouchsafes this sweet reward. Be-
hold

The banquet's vast luxuriance scattered
By prodigality with wanton hands
Careless of use. The enamoured heavy air,
Pregnant with perfume of a thousand flowers,
Falling in flaky rain from unseen hands,
Melts all the soul to indolence, and soothes
The swooning sense; the fountains splash and
murmur

In dreamy rhythm on the drowsy ear,
Blending with throbbing music soft and low,
Whose gentle cadences, from fretted string
And oaten stop blowing its mellow sound,
Mingle their dulcet harmonies, stealing
Into the brain and mellowing the spirit
To sensuous languors. See, around about
A thousand lamps, feeding on scented oils

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

In jewelled transparencies encaged, throw out
Their irised radiance, shedding warmth and light
Upon the gleaming marbles of the hall,
Teeming with mirth and revelry and love.
Rest thee, O Simeon, a little moment here;
And let thy wearied eye, that naught beholds
Save blinding leagues of sandy wastes stretching
Beneath the beating glare of desert suns,
Couch now an instant on the mellow scene.

SIMEON

Bleak were thy hills, O Judah, when He came,
My Lord and God, unsheltered from the winds,
Save for the lonely stable's broken thatch;
And for his tender limbs the manger's straw,
Cropped by the dumb, unconscious brutes, that
shared
His lowliness. Cast out by men, he found
Rude habitation with the beasts alone;
Nor light nor warmth diffused their tenderness
Around, nor ministrant were servile hands
In purple and fine linen to array
His innocence. He came unto his own,
And they received him not, and knew him not,
Rejected and despised of men. O Lord,
My God, e'en in the cradle thou didst choose
The way of sorrow, and, a babe, espouse

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

The bitter bride of poverty, to point
The way of those who love. O Holy Babe,
So low in thy humility that man,
By thine ensample, may be lifted up,
Raise us from out this slough of wantoness,
And by the desolation of thy crib
Forgive us this our sin's luxurious ease!

THALARCHUS

O Christ, thy poverty be mine!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

The savour of rare viands rise up to whet
The appetite, and moist the wrinkled lip
Of hunger with sharp longing.

SIMEON

Thou, O Lord,
Didst fast within the desert forty days,
And Satan tempted thee!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Thy throat is parched,
And all thy tongue afame with thirst; for dry
And hot the air under the desert sun,
And small the share of water brought to thee
By thy forgetful brethren of the cells.
Packed in its snowy bed the crater stands,
And cool the wine upon the crackled lip;

The F E A S T o f T H A L A R C H U S

Refreshing is the sweet, red draught charging
The feverish veins with ruddy life again.

SIMEON

When thou, O Lord, upon thy cross didst cry,
“I thirst,” they gave thee vinegar and gall.

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Thou’rt ever mindful, Simeon, of thy Lord;
And valorous art thou in thy vigilance.
All heaven rejoices in thy holiness.
Thalarchus thou hast won by dint of prayer
Accepting all the burden of his sins.
For this high Heaven permitted the assault
Of hell to-night to try thy fortitude;
And gloriously hast thou conquered, Simeon.
And now let not thy charity wane cold;
But as the imperial sun in heaven’s high arch,
Whose glowing eye looks down upon the earth’s
Outstretched demesne from morn’s to eve’s red
marge,
And sheds celestial heats on all alike,
So let the furnace of thy saintly love
Beam down its radiance on all sinners here.
Have pity on them, Simeon, and draw from
Heaven,
Through the vicarious offering of thyself,
Pardon and mercy. Heaven will hear; for what

C O L L E C T E D P O E M S

More grateful in heaven's eye, after the Lord's
Own sacrifice, the source and root of all,
Than the abandonment of utter love
Making atonement for another's sin?
For greater love than that a man lay down
His life for other, no man hath.

SIMEON

Yea, Lord,
Thy life Thou didst lay down for each and all,
Thy love immeasurable, and as thy love
Thy sacrifice. And Thou wast lifted up
To draw all things to Thee, and, drawing, win
The hearts of men to sacrifice of self,
And lose themselves in love of Thee, to find
Themselves in Thee transfigured! I, O Lord,
Seek only Thee, and them in Thee, and Thee
In them, whom Thou hast bought with a great
price!
Thou callest them, O Lord: grant them to hear!
And in thy mercy lift them up!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Simeon,
Behold Thais, the chiefest sinner here,
Steeped in the slumber of the wine! Pray thou
For her, a sinful daughter of weak Eve.
Let not such beauty be the prey of hell!

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Not Eve herself came from her Maker's hand
More fair. Slipped from the fillet's amorous
 clasp,
Her locks, like silken gold from looms of light,
Shower down a streaming glory gleaming about
The whiteness of her shoulder's ivory arch,
As star-shafts on the billow's crested foam;
Her lips incarnadine, her flushed cheek —

SIMEON

They gashed thy hands and feet with nails, O
 Lord,
And, lifting up thy heavy gibbet, plunged
It in its earthy socket shuddering,
Tearing thy tender, gaping wounds anew,
And racking all thy jarred and bruised frame
With sudden agony! Pierce me, O Lord,
With that fierce pain, and rack this recreant
 flesh,
The weak inheritance of Adam's sin,
That through thy merit I may somewise share
With thee the dire atonement of her sin!

DEMONS (*on left side*)

He escapes! Confusion and shame!
He escapes!

COLLECTED POEMS

DEMONS (*on right side, throwing off disguise*)

We are baffled!

The Tyrant suffers us not
To gain one slightest foothold
Within the circle of his soul!

DEMONS (*on left side*)

Upon him! Seize him!
Tear him! Smash his pillar!

DEMONS (*on right side*)

Unleash your pent rage like hail!
Assault him and crush him! Come!
Let all rush on like furious fire!

THALARCHUS

All hell vomits itself upon him! Lord,
Thy servant guard! Portentous they loom,
monstrous,
In size giants, in shape most horrible;
With eyes of fire and wide outstretching vans
With flaming lightnings veined, onward they
sweep,
As though to engulf the world in hellish storm!
But no! See, Heaven forbids! They sway!
They stop!
And now as swollen clouds, pregnant with death,

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Meeting an adverse wind, are stayed and blown
back,
Their dreadful host, sullen and muttering,
Recede before the breath of Heaven! And, lo!
They melt away into the empty air!

(Enter XENARES)

XENARES

My lord, the night is dying in the west,
And dawn appears. The guests are gone, save
those
Who lie here drowned in wine. The air is dank
With poisonous humours of the heavy morn,
And thou art pale. Wilt go within?

THALARCHUS

"Tis gone!
Evanished! O gracious vision by Heaven
vouchsafed!

XENARES

What, my lord?

THALARCHUS

The wonder of it!

XENARES

My lord,
Wilt come within? 'Tis damp: thou'rt ill.

COLLECTED POEMS

THALARCHUS

I am,
Xenares, ill and well.

XENARES

How's that, my lord?

THALARCHUS

Ill with the past, and well with what's to come.

XENARES

My lord, I do not understand.

THALARCHUS

Last night
Thou saw'st me ill.

XENARES

Nay, my good lord, never
Did health mantle more ruddy in thy cheek,
Nor shine so proudly in thine eye.

THALARCHUS

Yet was I ill;
Sick unto death! Ill in the lustful riot
Of misspent days, those precious pearls of time,
Which I, with wanton and regardless hand,
Flung on the dung-heaps of this wasteful world;
But now, Xenares, well in the high hope

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

Of Simeon's prayers and mine own penitence
Rooted within the rich, most precious earth
Of Christ's vast charity.

XENARES

May't please thee, sir,
To go within?

THALARCHUS

No, Xenares — hear me:
Of all my goods take inventory: pay
What I may owe out of my fortune's wreck,
Reserving for thyself a moiety
To keep thee from the fangs of beggary.
What may remain, give to the poor. To-day
I manumit thee: thou art free. I know
Thy worth and honest heart, and so repose
My trust. I go from Antioch.

XENARES

Indeed,
My lord, thou'rt very ill. I pray thee —

THALARCHUS

Nay,
Be not thus urgent. Hence I go forever.
I've quitted me the burden of this world.
The brave apparel of its swelling pride
I here discard, resigning all its pomp,

COLLECTED POEMS

Its purfled show, and strutting pageantry.
And I, who clothed me in its trumperies,
And waxed on all its fustianed vanities
As flaunting weeds upon the mucky earth,
These many and gross years, pitiless
Now scythe the rank and vicious growth, whose
bane
So long infected all the blood, and killed
The tender shoots of virtue in the soul.
Behold, Xenares, how the sober dawn,
In ghostly vapours creeping up the east,
Unmasks the glamour of the dying night,
And on the sodden ashes of our feast,
That flamed in furious riot this little while,
Spreads pale and gray as ghastly death
Upon the face of one who yields his soul.
So pass the sudden heats of time, the lusts
Of appetite, the hunger of possession,
Ambition's passion, love's desire,— all,
Yes, all that men, unrecking lower things
By higher lights, set heart upon below,
Mere bavin for the fiery tongue of change,
Scarce kindled ere in ashes! I've seen
This night, Xenares, through high Heaven's
mercy,
That which has shaken all my soul and torn
From out its ancient roots my tree of life

The FEAST of THALARCHUS

To plant anew in other soil, with hope
Of fruit celestial! For now I know,
My soul illumined by that kindly beam,
The deep philosophy of poverty,
The wealth of having naught, the precious gain
Of self-surrender, riches infinite,
Out of the nothingness of this base earth
Transmuted in th' alembic of God's love!
'Tis this I seek. Farewell: I go,
Xenares, and return no more.

XENARES

My lord, my lord!

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